



# COLLECTED ESSAYS

VOLUME THREE

VIRGINIA WOOLF

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS  
OF VIRGINIA WOOLF'S WORKS  
IN CONTENTS LIST

The Common Reader	C.R. I
The Moment	M
The Common Reader II	C.R. II
The Death of the Moth	D.M
The Captain's Death Bed	C.D.B
Granite and Rainbow	G.R





## CONTENTS

The Pastons and Chaucer (C.R.I)	1
Montaigne (C.R.I)	18
Sir Walter Raleigh (G.R.)	27
The Strange Elizabethans (C.R.II)	32
Rambling round Evelyn (C.R.I)	44
The Duchess of Newcastle (C.R.I)	51
Dorothy Osborne's <i>Letters</i> (C.R.II)	59
Madame de Sévigné (D.M.)	66
Swift's <i>Journal to Stella</i> (C.R.II)	71
Lord Chesterfield's Letters to His Son (C.R.II)	80
Sterne (G.R.)	86
Sterne's Ghost (M.)	94
Eliza and Sterne (G.R.)	100
Horace Walpole (G.R.)	105
Two Antiquaries: Walpole and Cole (D.M.)	110
The Rev. William Cole: A Letter (D.M.)	118
White's Selborne (C.D.B.)	122
A Friend of Johnson (G.R.)	127
Dr. Burney's Evening Party (C.R.II)	132
Fanny Burney's Half-sister (G.R.)	147
Mrs. Thrale (M.)	158
Two Parsons (C.R.II)	
I <i>James Woodforde</i>	163
II <i>The Rev. John Skinner</i>	168
Money and Love (G.R.)	

Four Figures (C.R.II)	
I <i>Cowper and Lady Austen</i>	181
II <i>Beau Brummell</i>	187
III <i>Mary Wollstonecraft</i>	193
IV <i>Dorothy Wordsworth</i>	199
Jones and Wilkinson (D.M.)	207
Selina Trimmer (C.D.B.)	213
The Man at the Gate (D.M.)	217
Sara Coleridge (D.M.)	222
Harriette Wilson (M.)	227

## The Pastons and Chaucer<sup>1</sup>

THE tower of Caister Castle still rises ninety feet into the air, and the arch still stands from which Sir John Fastolf's barges sailed out to fetch stone for the building of the great castle. But now jackdaws nest on the tower, and of the castle, which once covered six acres of ground, only ruined walls remain, pierced by loopholes and surmounted by battlements, though there are neither archers within nor cannon without. As for the 'seven religious men' and the 'seven poor folk' who should, at this very moment, be praying for the souls of Sir John and his parents, there is no sign of them nor sound of their prayers. The place is a ruin. Antiquaries speculate and differ.

Not so very far off lie more ruins—the ruins of Bromholm Priory, where John Paston was buried, naturally enough, since his house was only a mile or so away, lying on low ground by the sea, twenty miles north of Norwich. The coast is dangerous, and the land, even in our time, inaccessible. Nevertheless, the little bit of wood at Bromholm, the fragment of the true Cross, brought pilgrims incessantly to the Priory, and sent them away with eyes opened and limbs straightened. But some of them with their newly-opened eyes saw a sight which shocked them—the grave of John Paston in Bromholm Priory without a tombstone. The news spread over the countryside. The Pastons had fallen; they that had been so powerful could no longer afford a stone to put above John Paston's head. Margaret, his widow, could not pay her debts; the eldest son, Sir John, wasted his property upon women and tournaments, while the younger, John also, though a man of greater parts, thought more of his hawks than of his harvests.

The pilgrims of course were liars, as people whose eyes have just been opened by a piece of the true Cross have every right to be; but their news, none the less, was welcome. The Pastons had risen in the world. People said even that they had been bondmen not so very long ago. At any rate, men still living could remember John's grandfather Clement tilling his own land, a hard-working

<sup>1</sup> *The Paston Letters*, edited by Dr James Gairdner (1904), 4 vols

peasant; and William, Clement's son, becoming a judge and buying land; and John, William's son, marrying well and buying more land and quite lately inheriting the vast new castle at Caister, and all Sir John's lands in Norfolk and Suffolk. People said that he had forged the old knight's will. What wonder, then, that he lacked a tombstone? But, if we consider the character of Sir John Paston, John's eldest son, and his upbringing and his surroundings, and the relations between himself and his father as the family letters reveal them, we shall see how difficult it was, and how likely to be neglected—this business of making his father's tombstone.

For let us imagine, in the most desolate part of England known to us at the present moment, a raw, new-built house, without telephone, bathroom or drains, armchairs or newspapers, and one shelf perhaps of books, unwieldy to hold, expensive to come by. The windows look out upon a few cultivated fields and a dozen hovels, and beyond them there is the sea on one side, on the other a vast fen. A single road crosses the fen, but there is a hole in it, which, one of the farm-hands reports, is big enough to swallow a carriage. And, the man adds, Tom Topcroft, the mad bricklayer, has broken loose again and ranges the country half-naked, threatening to kill anyone who approaches him. That is what they talk about at dinner in the desolate house, while the chimney smokes horribly, and the draught lifts the carpets on the floor. Orders are given to lock all gates at sunset, and, when the long dismal evening has worn itself away, simply and solemnly, girt about with dangers as they are, these isolated men and women fall upon their knees in prayer.

In the fifteenth century, however, the wild landscape was broken suddenly and very strangely by vast piles of brand-new masonry. There rose out of the sand-hills and heaths of the Norfolk coast a huge bulk of stone, like a modern hotel in a watering-place; but there was no parade, no lodging-houses, and no pier at Yarmouth then, and this gigantic building on the outskirts of the town was built to house one solitary old gentleman without any children—Sir John Fastolf, who had fought at Agincourt and acquired great wealth. He had fought at Agincourt and got but little reward. No one took his advice. Men spoke ill of him behind his back. He was well aware of it; his temper was

none the sweeter for that. He was a hot-tempered old man, powerful, embittered by a sense of grievance. But whether on the battle-field or at court he thought perpetually of Caister, and how, when his duties allowed, he would settle down on his father's land and live in a great house of his own building.

The gigantic structure of Caister Castle was in progress not so many miles away when the little Pastons were children. John Paston, the father, had charge of some part of the business, and the children listened, as soon as they could listen at all, to talk of stone and building, of barges gone to London and not yet returned, of the twenty-six private chambers, of the hall and chapel; of foundations, measurements, and rascally work-people. Later, in 1454, when the work was finished and Sir John had come to spend his last years at Caister, they may have seen for themselves the mass of treasure that was stored there; the tables laden with gold and silver plate; the wardrobes stuffed with gowns of velvet and satin and cloth of gold, with hoods and tippets and beaver hats and leather jackets and velvet doublets; and how the very pillow-cases on the beds were of green and purple silk. There were tapestries everywhere. The beds were laid and the bedrooms hung with tapestries representing sieges, hunting and hawking, men fishing, archers shooting, ladies playing on their harps, dallying with ducks, or a giant 'bearing the leg of a bear in his hand'. Such were the fruits of a well-spent life. To buy land, to build great houses, to stuff these houses full of gold and silver plate (though the privy might well be in the bedroom), was the proper aim of mankind. Mr. and Mrs. Paston spent the greater part of their energies in the same exhausting occupation. For since the passion to acquire was universal, one could never rest secure in one's possessions for long. The outlying parts of one's property were in perpetual jeopardy. The Duke of Norfolk might covet this manor, the Duke of Suffolk that. Some trumped-up excuse, as for instance that the Pastons were bondmen, gave them the right to seize the house and batter down the lodges in the owner's absence. And how could the owner of Paston and Mauteby and Drayton and Gresham be in five or six places at once, especially now that Caister Castle was his, and he must be in London trying to get his rights recognized by the King? The King was mad too, they said; did not know his own child, they said; or the King was in

flight; or there was civil war in the land. Norfolk was always the most distressed of counties and its country gentlemen the most quarrelsome of mankind. Indeed, had Mrs. Paston chosen, she could have told her children how when she was a young woman a thousand men with bows and arrows and pans of burning fire had marched upon Gresham and broken the gates and mined the walls of the room where she sat alone. But much worse things than that happened to women. She neither bewailed her lot nor thought herself a heroine. The long, long letters which she wrote so laboriously in her clear cramped hand to her husband, who was (as usual) away, make no mention of herself. The sheep had wasted the hay. Heyden's and Tuddenham's men were out. A dyke had been broken and a bullock stolen. They needed treacle badly, and really she must have stuff for a dress.

But Mrs. Paston did not talk about herself.

Thus the little Pastons would see their mother writing or dictating page after page, hour after hour, long long letters, but to interrupt a parent who writes so laboriously of such important matters would have been a sin. The prattle of children, the lore of the nursery or schoolroom, did not find its way into these elaborate communications. For the most part her letters are the letters of an honest bailiff to his master, explaining, asking advice, giving news, rendering accounts. There was robbery and manslaughter; it was difficult to get in the rents; Richard Calle had gathered but little money; and what with one thing and another Margaret had not had time to make out, as she should have done, the inventory of the goods which her husband desired. Well might old Agnes, surveying her son's affairs rather grimly from a distance, counsel him to contrive it so that 'ye may have less to do in the world; your father said, In little business lieth much rest. This world is but a thoroughfare, and full of woe; and when we depart therefrom, right nought bear with us but our good deeds and ill.'

The thought of death would thus come upon them in a clap. Old Fastolf, cumbered with wealth and property, had his vision at the end of Hell fire, and shrieked aloud to his executors to distribute alms, and see that prayers were said 'in perpetuum', so that his soul might escape the agonies of purgatory. William Paston, the judge, was urgent too that the monks of Norwich should be retained to pray for his soul 'for ever'. The soul was no

wisp of air, but a solid body capable of eternal suffering, and the fire that destroyed it was as fierce as any that burnt on mortal grates. For ever there would be monks and the town of Norwich, and for ever the Chapel of Our Lady in the town of Norwich. There was something matter-of-fact, positive, and enduring in their conception both of life and of death.

With the plan of existence so vigorously marked out, children of course were well beaten, and boys and girls taught to know their places. They must acquire land; but they must obey their parents. A mother would clout her daughter's head three times a week and break the skin if she did not conform to the laws of behaviour. Agnes Paston, a lady of birth and breeding, beat her daughter Elizabeth. Margaret Paston, a softer-hearted woman, turned her daughter out of the house for loving the honest bailiff Richard Calle. Brothers would not suffer their sisters to marry beneath them, and 'sell candle and mustard in Framlingham'. The fathers quarrelled with the sons, and the mothers, fonder of their boys than of their girls, yet bound by all law and custom to obey their husbands, were torn asunder in their efforts to keep the peace. With all her pains, Margaret failed to prevent rash acts on the part of her eldest son John, or the bitter words with which his father denounced him. He was a 'drone among bees', the father burst out, 'which labour for gathering honey in the fields, and the drone doth naught but taketh his part of it'. He treated his parents with insolence, and yet was fit for no charge of responsibility abroad.

But the quarrel was ended, very shortly, by the death (22nd May 1466) of John Paston, the father, in London. The body was brought down to Bromholm to be buried. Twelve poor men trudged all the way bearing torches beside it. Alms were distributed; masses and dirges were said. Bells were rung. Great quantities of fowls, sheep, pigs, eggs, bread, and cream were devoured, ale and wine drunk, and candles burnt. Two panes were taken from the church windows to let out the reek of the torches. Black cloth was distributed, and a light set burning on the grave. But John Paston, the heir, delayed to make his father's tombstone.

He was a young man, something over twenty-four years of age. The discipline and the drudgery of a country life bored him. When he ran away from home, it was, apparently, to attempt to

enter the King's household. Whatever doubts, indeed, might be cast by their enemies on the blood of the Pastons, Sir John was unmistakably a gentleman. He had inherited his lands; the honey was his that the bees had gathered with so much labour. He had the instincts of enjoyment rather than of acquisition, and with his mother's parsimony was strangely mixed something of his father's ambition. Yet his own indolent and luxurious temperament took the edge from both. He was attractive to women, liked society and tournaments, and court life and making bets, and sometimes, even, reading books. And so life now that John Paston was buried started afresh upon rather a different foundation. There could be little outward change indeed. Margaret still ruled the house. She still ordered the lives of the younger children as she had ordered the lives of the elder. The boys still needed to be beaten into book-learning by their tutors, the girls still loved the wrong men and must be married to the right. Rents had to be collected; the interminable lawsuit for the Fastolf property dragged on. Battles were fought; the roses of York and Lancaster alternately faded and flourished. Norfolk was full of poor people seeking redress for their grievances, and Margaret worked for her son as she had worked for her husband, with this significant change only, that now, instead of confiding in her husband, she took the advice of her priest.

But inwardly there was a change. It seems at last as if the hard outer shell had served its purpose and something sensitive, appreciative, and pleasure-loving had formed within. At any rate Sir John, writing to his brother John at home, strayed sometimes from the business on hand to crack a joke, to send a piece of gossip, or to instruct him, knowingly and even subtly, upon the conduct of a love affair. Be 'as lowly to the mother as ye list, but to the maid not too lowly, nor that ye be too glad to speed, nor too sorry to fail. And I shall always be your herald both here, if she come hither, and at home, when I come home, which I hope hastily within XI. days at the furthest.' And then a hawk was to be bought, a hat, or new silk laces sent down to John in Norfolk, prosecuting his suit, flying his hawks, and attending with considerable energy and not too nice a sense of honesty to the affairs of the Paston estates.

The lights had long since burnt out on John Paston's grave. But still Sir John delayed; no tomb replaced them. He had his



excuses; what with the business of the lawsuit, and his duties at Court, and the disturbance of the civil wars, his time was occupied and his money spent. But perhaps something strange had happened to Sir John himself, and not only to Sir John dallying in London, but to his sister Margery falling in love with the bailiff, and to Walter making Latin verses at Eton, and to John flying his hawks at Paston. Life was a little more various in its pleasures. They were not quite so sure as the elder generation had been of the rights of man and of the dues of God, of the horrors of death, and of the importance of tombstones. Poor Margaret Paston scented the change and sought uneasily, with the pen which had marched so stiffly through so many pages, to lay bare the root of her troubles. It was not that the lawsuit saddened her; she was ready to defend Caister with her own hands if need be, 'though I cannot well guide nor rule soldiers', but there was something wrong with the family since the death of her husband and master. Perhaps her son had failed in his service to God; he had been too proud or too lavish in his expenditure; or perhaps he had shown too little mercy to the poor. Whatever the fault might be, she only knew that Sir John spent twice as much money as his father for less result; that they could scarcely pay their debts without selling land, wood, or household stuff ('It is a death to me to think if it'); while every day people spoke ill of them in the country because they left John Paston to lie without a tombstone. The money that might have bought it, or more land, and more goblets and more tapestry, was spent by Sir John on clocks and trinkets, and upon paying a clerk to copy out Treatises upon Knighthood and other such stuff. There they stood at Paston—eleven volumes, with the poems of Lydgate and Chaucer among them, diffusing a strange air into the gaunt, comfortless house, inviting men to indolence and vanity, distracting their thoughts from business, and leading them not only to neglect their own profit but to think lightly of the sacred dues of the dead.

For sometimes, instead of riding off on his horse to inspect his crops or bargain with his tenants, Sir John would sit, in broad daylight, reading. There, on the hard chair in the comfortless room with the wind lifting the carpet and the smoke stinging his eyes, he would sit reading Chaucer, wasting his time, dreaming—or what strange intoxication was it that he drew from books? Life

was rough, cheerless, and disappointing. A whole year of days would pass fruitlessly in dreary business, like dashes of rain on the window-pane. There was no reason in it as there had been for his father; no imperative need to establish a family and acquire an important position for children who were not born, or if born, had no right to bear their father's name. But Lydgate's poems or Chaucer's, like a mirror in which figures move brightly, silently, and compactly, showed him the very skies, fields, and people whom he knew, but rounded and complete. Instead of waiting listlessly for news from London or piecing out from his mother's gossip some country tragedy of love and jealousy, here, in a few pages, the whole story was laid before him. And then as he rode or sat at table he would remember some description or saying which bore upon the present moment and fixed it, or some string of words would charm him, and putting aside the pressure of the moment, he would hasten home to sit in his chair and learn the end of the story.

To learn the end of the story—Chaucer can still make us wish to do that. He has pre-eminently that story-teller's gift, which is almost the rarest gift among writers at the present day. Nothing happens to us as it did to our ancestors; events are seldom important; if we recount them, we do not really believe in them; we have perhaps things of greater interest to say, and for these reasons natural story-tellers like Mr. Garnett, whom we must distinguish from self-conscious story-tellers like Mr. Masfield, have become rare. For the story-teller, besides his indescribable zest for facts, must tell his story craftily, without undue stress or excitement, or we shall swallow it whole and jumble the parts together; he must let us stop, give us time to think and look about us, yet always be persuading us to move on. Chaucer was helped to this to some extent by the time of his birth; and in addition he had another advantage over the moderns which will never come the way of English poets again. England was an unspoilt country. His eyes rested on a virgin land, all unbroken grass and wood except for the small towns and an occasional castle in the building. No villa roofs peered through Kentish tree-tops; no factory chimney smoked on the hillside. The state of the country, considering how poets go to Nature, how they use her for their images and their

contrasts even when they do not describe her directly, is a matter of some importance. Her cultivation or her savagery influences the poet far more profoundly than the prose writer. To the modern poet, with Birmingham, Manchester, and London the size they are, the country is the sanctuary of moral excellence in contrast with the town which is the sink of vice. It is a retreat, the haunt of modesty and virtue, where men go to hide and moralize. There is something morbid, as if shrinking from human contact, in the nature worship of Wordsworth, still more in the microscopic devotion which Tennyson lavished upon the petals of roses and the buds of lime trees. But these were great poets. In their hands, the country was no mere jeweller's shop, or museum of curious objects to be described, even more curiously, in words. Poets of smaller gift, since the view is so much spoilt, and the garden or the meadow must replace the barren heath and the precipitous mountainside, are now confined to little landscapes, to birds' nests, to acorns with every wrinkle drawn to the life. The wider landscape is lost.

But to Chaucer the country was too large and too wild to be altogether agreeable. He turned instinctively, as if he had painful experience of their nature, from tempests and rocks to the bright May day and the jocund landscape, from the harsh and mysterious to the gay and definite. Without possessing a tithe of the virtuosity in word-painting which is the modern inheritance, he could give, in a few words, or even, when we come to look, without a single word of direct description, the sense of the open air.

And se the fresshe floures how they sprynge

—that is enough.

Nature, uncompromising, untamed, was no looking-glass for happy faces, or confessor of unhappy souls. She was herself; sometimes, therefore, disagreeable enough and plain, but always in Chaucer's pages with the hardness and the freshness of an actual presence. Soon, however, we notice something of greater importance than the gay and picturesque appearance of the mediaeval world—the solidity which plumps it out, the conviction which animates the characters. There is immense variety in the *Canterbury Tales*, and yet, persisting underneath, one consistent type. Chaucer has his world; he has his young men; he has his young

women. If one met them straying in Shakespeare's world one would know them to be Chaucer's, not Shakespeare's. He wants to describe a girl, and this is what she looks like:

Ful semely hir wimpel pinched was,  
 Hir nose tretys; hir eyen greye as glas;  
 Hir mouth ful smal, and ther-to soft and reed;  
 But sikerly she hadde a fair foreheed;  
 It was almost a spanne brood, I trowe;  
 For, hardily, she was nat undergrowe.

Then he goes on to develop her; she was a girl, a virgin, cold in her virginity:

I am, thou woost, yet of thy companye,  
 A mayde, and love hunting and venerye,  
 And for to walken in the wodes wilde,  
 And noght to been a wyt and be with childe.

Next he bethinks him how

Discreet she was in answering alway;  
 And though she had been as wise as Pallas  
 No countrefeted termes hadde she  
 To seme wys; but after hir degree  
 She spak, and alle hir wordes more and lesse  
 Souninge in vertu and in gentillesse.

Each of these quotations, in fact, comes from a different Tale, but they are parts, one feels, of the same personage, whom he had in mind, perhaps unconsciously, when he thought of a young girl, and for this reason, as she goes in and out of the *Canterbury Tales* bearing different names, she has a stability which is only to be found where the poet has made up his mind about young women, of course, but also about the world they live in, its end, its nature, and his own craft and technique, so that his mind is free to apply its force fully to its object. It does not occur to him that his Griselda might be improved or altered. There is no blur about her, no hesitation; she proves nothing; she is content to be herself. Upon her, therefore, the mind can rest with that unconscious ease which allows it, from hints and suggestions, to endow her with many more qualities than are actually referred to. Such is the power of conviction, a rare gift, a gift shared in our day by Joseph Conrad in his earlier novels, and a gift of supreme importance, for

upon it the whole weight of the building depends. Once believe in Chaucer's young men and women and we have no need of preaching or protest. We know what he finds good, what evil; the less said the better. Let him get on with his story, paint knights and squires, good women and bad, cooks, shipmen, priests, and we will supply the landscape, give his society its belief, its standing towards life and death, and make of the journey to Canterbury a spiritual pilgrimage.

This simple faithfulness to his own conceptions was easier then than now in one respect at least, for Chaucer could write frankly where we must either say nothing or say it slyly. He could sound every note in the language instead of finding a great many of the best gone dumb from disuse, and thus, when struck by daring fingers, giving off a loud discordant jangle out of keeping with the rest. Much of Chaucer—a few lines perhaps in each of the Tales—is improper and gives us as we read it the strange sensation of being naked to the air after being muffled in old clothing. And, as a certain kind of humour depends upon being able to speak without self-consciousness of the parts and functions of the body, so with the advent of decency literature lost the use of one of its limbs. It lost its power to create the Wife of Bath, Juliet's nurse, and their recognizable though already colourless relation, Moll Flanders. Sterne, from fear of coarseness, is forced into indecency. He must be witty, not humorous; he must hint instead of speaking outright. Nor can we believe, with Mr. Joyce's *Ulysses* before us, that laughter of the old kind will ever be heard again.

But, lord Christ! When that it remembreth me  
Up-on my yowthe, and on my Iolitee,  
It tikleth me aboute myn herte rote.  
Unto this day it doth myn herte bote  
That I have had my world as in my tyme.

The sound of that old woman's voice is still.

But there is another and more important reason for the surprising brightness, the still effective merriment of the *Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer was a poet; but he never flinched from the life that was being lived at the moment before his eyes. A farmyard, with its straw, its dung, its cocks and its hens, is not (we have come to think) a poetic subject; poets seem either to rule out the farm-

yard entirely or to require that it shall be a farmyard in Thessaly and its pigs of mythological origin. But Chaucer says outright:

Three large sowes hadde she, and namo,  
Three kyn, and eek a sheep that highte Malle;

or again,

A yard she hadde, enclosed al aboute  
With stikkes, and a drye ditch with-oute.

He is unabashed and unafraid. He will always get close up to his object—an old man's chin—

With thikke bristles of his berde unsofte,  
Lyk to the skin of houndfish, sharp as brere;

or an old man's neck—

The slakke skin aboute his nekke shaketh  
Whyl that he sang;

and he will tell you what his characters wore, how they looked, what they ate and drank, as if poetry could handle the common facts of this very moment of Tuesday, the sixteenth day of April, 1387, without dirtying her hands. If he withdraws to the time of the Greeks or the Romans, it is only that his story leads him there. He has no desire to wrap himself round in antiquity, to take refuge in age, or to shirk the associations of common grocer's English.

Therefore when we say that we know the end of the journey, it is hard to quote the particular lines from which we take out knowledge. Chaucer fixed his eyes upon the road before him, not upon the world to come. He was little given to abstract contemplation. He deprecated, with peculiar archness, any competition with the scholars and divines:

The answare of this I lete to divynis,  
But wel I woot, that in this world grey pyne is.

What is this world? What asketh men to have?  
Now with his love, now in the colde grave  
Allone, withouten any companye,  
O cruel goddes, that governe

This world with binding of your worde eterne,  
 And wryten in the table of athamaunt  
 Your parlement, and your eterne graunt,  
 What is mankinde more un-to yow holde  
 Than is the sheepe, that rouketh in the folde?

Questions press upon him; he asks them, but he is too true a poet to answer them; he leaves them unsolved, uncramped by the solution of the moment, and thus fresh for the generations that come after him. In his life, too, it would be impossible to write him down a man of this party or of that, a democrat or an aristocrat. He was a staunch churchman, but he laughed at priests. He was an able public servant and a courtier, but his views upon sexual morality were extremely lax. He sympathized with poverty, but did nothing to improve the lot of the poor. It is safe to say that not a single law has been framed or one stone set upon another because of anything that Chaucer said or wrote; and yet, as we read him, we are absorbing morality at every pore. For among writers there are two kinds: there are the priests who take you by the hand and lead you straight up to the mystery; there are the laymen who imbed their doctrines in flesh and blood and make a complete model of the world without excluding the bad or laying stress upon the good. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley are among the priests; they give us text after text to be hung upon the wall, saying after saying to be laid upon the heart like an amulet against disaster—

Farewell, farewell, the heart that lives alone

He prayeth best that loveth best  
 All things both great and small

—such lines of exhortation and command spring to memory instantly. But Chaucer lets us go our ways doing the ordinary things with the ordinary people. His morality lies in the way men and women behave to each other. We see them eating, drinking, laughing, and making love, and come to feel without a word being said what their standards are and so are steeped through and through with their morality. There can be no more forcible preaching than this where all actions and passions are represented, and instead of being solemnly exhorted we are left to stray and stare and make out a meaning for ourselves. It is the

morality of ordinary intercourse, the morality of the novel, which parents and librarians rightly judge to be far more persuasive than the morality of poetry.

And so, when we shut Chaucer, we feel that without a word being said the criticism is complete; what we are saying, thinking, reading, doing, has been commented upon. Nor are we left merely with the sense, powerful though that is, of having been in good company and got used to the ways of good society. For as we have jogged through the real, the unadorned countryside, with first one good fellow cracking his joke or singing his song and then another, we know that though this world resembles, it is not in fact our daily world. It is the world of poetry. Everything happens here more quickly and more intensely, and with better order than in life or in prose; there is a formal elevated dullness which is part of the incantation of poetry; there are lines speaking half a second in advance what we were about to say, as if we read our thoughts before words cumbered them; and lines which we go back to read again with that heightened quality, that enchantment which keeps them glittering in the mind long afterwards. And the whole is held in its place, and its variety and divagations ordered by the power which is among the most impressive of all—the shaping power, the architect's power. It is the peculiarity of Chaucer, however, that though we feel at once this quickening, this enchantment, we cannot prove it by quotation. From most poets quotation is easy and obvious; some metaphor suddenly flowers; some passage breaks off from the rest. But Chaucer is very equal, very even-paced, very un-metaphorical. If we take six or seven lines in the hope that the quality will be contained in them it has escaped.

My lord, ye woot that in my fadres place,  
 Ye dede me strepe out of my povre wede,  
 And richely me cladden, o your grace  
 To yow broghte I noght elles, out of drede,  
 But feyth and nakedness and maydenhede.

In its place that seemed not only memorable and moving but fit to set beside striking beauties. Cut out and taken separately it appears ordinary and quiet. Chaucer, it seems, has some art by which the most ordinary words and the simplest feelings when



laid side by side make each other shine; when separated, lose their lustre. Thus the pleasure he gives us is different from the pleasure that other poets give us, because it is more closely connected with what we have ourselves felt or observed. Eating, drinking, and fine weather, the May, cocks and hens, millers, old peasant women, flowers—there is a special stimulus in seeing all these common things so arranged that they affect us as poetry affects us, and are yet bright, sober, precise as we see them out of doors. There is a pungency in this unfigurative language; a stately and memorable beauty in the undraped sentences which follow each other like women so slightly veiled that you see the lines of their bodies as they go—

And she set down hir water pot anon  
Beside the threshold in an oxen's stall.

And then, as the procession takes its way, out from behind peeps the face of Chaucer, in league with all foxes, donkeys, and hens, to mock the pomps and ceremonies of life—witty, intellectual, French, at the same time based upon a broad bottom of English humour.

So Sir John read his Chaucer in the comfortless room with the wind blowing and the smoke stinging, and left his father's tombstone unmade. But no book, no tomb, had power to hold him long. He was one of those ambiguous characters who haunt the boundary line where one age merges in another and are not able to inhabit either. At one moment he was all for buying books cheap; next he was off to France and told his mother, 'My mind is now not most upon books.' In his own house, where his mother Margaret was perpetually making out inventories or confiding in Gloys the priest, he had no peace or comfort. There was always reason on her side; she was a brave woman, for whose sake one must put up with the priest's insolence and choke down one's rage when the grumbling broke into open abuse, and 'Thou proud priest' and 'Thou proud Squire' were bandied angrily about the room. All this, with the discomforts of life and the weakness of his own character, drove him to loiter in pleasanter places, to put off coming, to put off writing, to put off, year after year, the making of his father's tombstone.

Yet John Paston had now lain for twelve years under the bare ground. The Prior of Bromholm sent word that the grave-cloth was in tatters, and he had tried to patch it himself. Worse still, for a proud woman like Margaret Paston, the country people murmured at the Pastons' lack of piety, and other families she heard, of no greater standing than theirs, spent money in pious restoration in the very church where her husband lay unremembered. At last, turning from tournaments and Chaucer and Mistress Anne Hault, Sir John bethought him of a piece of cloth of gold which had been used to cover his father's hearse and might now be sold to defray the expenses of his tomb. Margaret had it in safe keeping; she had hoarded it and cared for it, and spent twenty marks on its repair. She grudged it; but there was no help for it. She sent it him, still distrusting his intentions or his power to put them into effect. 'If you sell it to any other use,' she wrote, 'by my troth I shall never trust you while I live.'

But this final act, like so many that Sir John had undertaken in the course of his life, was left undone. A dispute with the Duke of Suffolk in the year 1479 made it necessary for him to visit London in spite of the epidemic of sickness that was abroad; and there, in dirty lodgings, alone, busy to the end with quarrels, clamorous to the end for money, Sir John died and was buried at Whitefriars in London. He left a natural daughter; he left a considerable number of books; but his father's tomb was still unmade.

The four thick volumes of the Paston letters, however, swallow up this frustrated man as the sea absorbs a raindrop. For, like all collections of letters, they seem to hint that we need not care overmuch for the fortunes of individuals. The family will go on, whether Sir John lives or dies. It is their method to heap up in mounds of insignificant and often dismal dust the innumerable trivialities of daily life, as it grinds itself out, year after year. And then suddenly they blaze up; the day shines out, complete, alive, before our eyes. It is early morning, and strange men have been whispering among the women as they milk. It is evening, and there in the churchyard Warne's wife bursts out against old Agnes Paston: 'All the devils of Hell draw her soul to Hell.' Now it is the autumn in Norfolk, and Cecily Dawne comes whining to Sir John for clothing. 'Moreover, Sir, liketh it your mastership

to understand that winter and cold weather draweth nigh and I have few clothes but of your gift.' There is the ancient day, spread out before us, hour by hour.

But in all this there is no writing for writing's sake; no use of the pen to convey pleasure or amusement or any of the million shades of endearment and intimacy which have filled so many English letters since. Only occasionally, under stress of anger for the most part, does Margaret Paston quicken into some shrewd saw or solemn curse. 'Men cut large thongs here out of other men's leather. . . . We beat the bushes and other men have the birds. . . . Haste reweth . . . which is to my heart a very spear.' That is her eloquence and that her anguish. Her sons, it is true, bend their pens more easily to their will. They jest rather stiffly; they hint rather clumsily; they make a little scene like a rough puppet show of the old priest's anger and give a phrase or two directly as they were spoken in person. But when Chaucer lived he must have heard this very language, matter of fact, unmetaphorical, far better fitted for narrative than for analysis, capable of religious solemnity or of broad humour, but very stiff material to put on the lips of men and women accosting each other face to face. In short, it is easy to see, from the Paston letters, why Chaucer wrote not *Lear* or *Romeo and Juliet*, but the *Canterbury Tales*.

Sir John was buried; and John the younger brother succeeded in his turn. The Paston letters go on; life at Paston continues much the same as before. Over it all broods a sense of discomfort and nakedness; of unwashed limbs thrust into splendid clothing; of tapestry blowing on the draughty walls; of the bedroom with its privy; of winds sweeping straight over land unmitigated by hedge or town; of Caister Castle covering with solid stone six acres of ground, and of the plain-faced Pastons indefatigably accumulating wealth, treading out the roads of Norfolk, and persisting with an obstinate courage which does them infinite credit in furnishing the bareness of England.

## Montaigne

ONCE at Bar-le-Duc Montaigne saw a portrait which René, King of Sicily, had painted of himself, and asked, 'Why is it not, in like manner, lawful for everyone to draw himself with a pen, as he did with a crayon?' Off-hand one might reply, Not only is it lawful, but nothing could be easier. Other people may evade us, but our own features are almost too familiar. Let us begin. And then, when we attempt the task, the pen falls from our fingers; it is a matter of profound, mysterious, and overwhelming difficulty.

After all, in the whole of literature, how many people have succeeded in drawing themselves with a pen? Only Montaigne and Pepys and Rousseau perhaps. The *Religio Medici* is a coloured glass through which darkly one sees racing stars and a strange and turbulent soul. A bright polished mirror reflects the face of Boswell peeping between other people's shoulders in the famous biography. But this talking of oneself, following one's own vagaries, giving the whole map, weight, colour, and circumference of the soul in its confusion, its variety, its imperfection—this art belonged to one man only: to Montaigne. As the centuries go by, there is always a crowd before that picture, gazing into its depths, seeing their own faces reflected in it, seeing more the longer they look, never being able to say quite what it is that they see. New editions testify to the perennial fascination. Here is the Navarre Society in England reprinting in five fine volumes<sup>1</sup> Cotton's translation; while in France the firm of Louis Conard is issuing the complete works of Montaigne with the various readings in an edition to which Dr. Armaingaud has devoted a long lifetime of research.

To tell the truth about oneself, to discover oneself near at hand, is not easy.

We hear of but two or three of the ancients who have beaten this road [said Montaigne]. No one since has followed the track; 'tis a rugged road, more so than it seems, to follow a pace so

<sup>1</sup> *Essays of Montaigne*, translated by Charles Cotton, 5 vols. The Navarre Society, £6 6s net.

rambling and uncertain, as that of the soul; to penetrate the dark profundities of its intricate internal windings; to choose and lay hold of so many little nimble motions; 'tis a new and extraordinary undertaking, and that withdraws us from the common and most recommended employments of the world.

There is, in the first place, the difficulty of expression. We all indulge in the strange, pleasant process called thinking, but when it comes to saying, even to someone opposite, what we think, then how little we are able to convey! The phantom is through the mind and out of the window before we can lay salt on its tail, or slowly sinking and returning to the profound darkness which it has lit up momentarily with a wandering light. Face, voice, and accent eke out our words and impress their feebleness with character in speech. But the pen is a rigid instrument; it can say very little; it has all kinds of habits and ceremonies of its own. It is dictatorial too: it is always making ordinary men into prophets, and changing the natural stumbling trip of human speech into the solemn and stately march of pens. It is for this reason that Montaigne stands out from the legions of the dead with such irrepressible vivacity. We can never doubt for an instant that his book was himself. He refused to teach; he refused to preach; he kept on saying that he was just like other people. All his effort was to write himself down, to communicate, to tell the truth, and that is a 'rugged road, more so than it seems'.

For beyond the difficulty of communicating oneself, there is the supreme difficulty of being oneself. This soul, or life within us, by no means agrees with the life outside us. If one has the courage to ask her what she thinks, she is always saying the very opposite to what other people say. Other people, for instance, long ago made up their minds that old invalidish gentlemen ought to stay at home and edify the rest of us by the spectacle of their connubial fidelity. The soul of Montaigne said, on the contrary, that it is in old age that one ought to travel, and marriage, which, rightly, is very seldom founded on love, is apt to become, towards the end of life, a formal tie better broken up. Again with politics, statesmen are always praising the greatness of Empire, and preaching the moral duty of civilizing the savage. But look at the Spanish in Mexico, cried Montaigne in a burst of rage. 'So many cities levelled with the ground, so many nations exterminated . . .

and the richest and most beautiful part of the world turned upside down for the traffic of pearl and pepper! Mechanic victories! And then when the peasants came and told him that they had found a man dying of wounds and deserted him for fear lest justice might incriminate them, Montaigne asked:

What could I have said to these people? 'Tis certain that this office of humanity would have brought them into trouble. . . . There is nothing so much, nor so grossly, nor so ordinarily faulty as the laws.

Here the soul, getting restive, is lashing out at the more palpable forms of Montaigne's great bugbears, convention and ceremony. But watch her as she broods over the fire in the inner room of that tower which, though detached from the main building, has so wide a view over the estate. Really she is the strangest creature in the world, far from heroic, variable as a weathercock, 'bashful, insolent; chaste, lustful; prating, silent; laborious, delicate; ingenious, heavy; melancholic, pleasant; lying, true; knowing, ignorant; liberal, covetous, and prodigal'—in short, so complex, so indefinite, corresponding so little to the version which does duty for her in public, that a man might spend his life merely in trying to run her to earth. The pleasure of the pursuit more than rewards one for any damage that it may inflict upon one's worldly prospects. The man who is aware of himself is henceforward independent; and he is never bored, and life is only too short, and he is steeped through and through with a profound yet temperate happiness. He alone lives, while other people, slaves of ceremony, let life slip past them in a kind of dream. Once conform, once do what other people do because they do it, and a lethargy steals over all the finer nerves and faculties of the soul. She becomes all outer show and inward emptiness; dull, callous, and indifferent.

Surely then, if we ask this great master of the art of life to tell us his secret, he will advise us to withdraw to the inner room of our tower and there turn the pages of books, pursue fancy after fancy as they chase each other up the chimney, and leave the government of the world to others. Retirement and contemplation—these must be the main elements of his prescription. But no; Montaigne is by no means explicit. It is impossible to extract a plain answer from that subtle, half-smiling, half-melancholy man,

with the heavy-lidded eyes and the dreamy, quizzical expression. The truth is that life in the country, with one's books and vegetables and flowers, is often extremely dull. He could never see that his own green peas were so much better than other people's. Paris was the place he loved best in the whole world—'jusques à ses verrues et à ses taches'. As for reading, he could seldom read any book for more than an hour at a time, and his memory was so bad that he forgot what was in his mind as he walked from one room to another. Book learning is nothing to be proud of, and as for the achievements of science, what do they amount to? He had always mixed with clever men, and his father had a positive veneration for them, but he had observed that, though they have their fine moments, their rhapsodies, their visions, the cleverest tremble on the verge of folly. Observe yourself: one moment you are exalted; the next a broken glass puts your nerves on edge. All extremes are dangerous. It is best to keep in the middle of the road, in the common ruts, however muddy. In writing choose the common words; avoid rhapsody and eloquence—yet, it is true, poetry is delicious; the best prose is that which is most full of poetry.

It appears, then, that we are to aim at a democratic simplicity. We may enjoy our room in the tower, with the painted walls and the commodious bookcases, but down in the garden there is a man digging who buried his father this morning, and it is he and his like who live the real life and speak the real language. There is certainly an element of truth in that. Things are said very finely at the lower end of the table. There are perhaps more of the qualities that matter among the ignorant than among the learned. But again, what a vile thing the rabble is! 'the mother of ignorance, injustice, and inconstancy. Is it reasonable that the life of a wise man should depend upon the judgment of fools?' Their minds are weak, soft and without power of resistance. They must be told what it is expedient for them to know. It is not for them to face facts as they are. The truth can only be known by the well-born soul—'l'âme bien née'. Who, then, are these well-born souls, whom we would imitate if only Montaigne would enlighten us more precisely?

But no. 'Je n'enseigne point; je raconte.' After all, how could he explain other people's souls when he could say nothing 'entirely

simply and solidly, without confusion or mixture, in one word', about his own, when indeed it became daily more and more in the dark to him? One quality or principle there is perhaps—that one must not lay down rules. The souls whom one would wish to resemble, like Étienne de La Boétie, for example, are always the supplest. 'C'est estre, mais ce n'est pas vivre, que de se tenir attaché et obligé par nécessité a un seul train.' The laws are mere conventions, utterly unable to keep touch with the vast variety and turmoil of human impulses; habits and customs are a convenience devised for the support of timid natures who dare not allow their souls free play. But we, who have a private life and hold it infinitely the dearest of our possessions, suspect nothing so much as an attitude. Directly we begin to protest, to attitudinize, to lay down laws, we perish. We are living for others, not for ourselves. We must respect those who sacrifice themselves in the public service, load them with honours, and pity them for allowing, as they must, the inevitable compromise; but for ourselves let us fly fame, honour, and all offices that put us under an obligation to others. Let us simmer over our incalculable cauldron, our enthralling confusion, our hotch-potch of impulses, our perpetual miracle—for the soul throws up wonders every second. Movement and change are the essence of our being; rigidity is death; conformity is death: let us say what comes into our heads, repeat ourselves, contradict ourselves, fling out the wildest nonsense, and follow the most fantastic fancies without caring what the world does or thinks or says. For nothing matters except life; and, of course, order.

This freedom, then, which is the essence of our being, has to be controlled. But it is difficult to see what power we are to invoke to help us, since every restraint of private opinion or public law has been derided, and Montaigne never ceases to pour scorn upon the misery, the weakness, the vanity of human nature. Perhaps, then, it will be well to turn to religion to guide us? 'Perhaps' is one of his favourite expressions; 'perhaps' and 'I think' and all those words which qualify the rash assumptions of human ignorance. Such words help one to muffle up opinions which it would be highly impolitic to speak outright. For one does not say everything; there are some things which at present it is advisable only to hint. One writes for a very few people, who



understand. Certainly, seek the Divine guidance by all means, but meanwhile there is, for those who live a private life, another monitor, an invisible censor within, 'un patron au dedans', whose blame is much more to be dreaded than any other because he knows the truth; nor is there anything sweeter than the chime of his approval. This is the judge to whom we must submit; this is the censor who will help us to achieve that order which is the grace of a well-born soul. For 'C'est une vie exquisite, celle qui se maintient en ordre jusques en son privé'. But he will act by his own light; by some internal balance will achieve that precarious and everchanging poise which, while it controls, in no way impedes the soul's freedom to explore and experiment. Without other guide, and without precedent, undoubtedly it is far more difficult to live well the private life than the public. It is an art which each must learn separately, though there are, perhaps, two or three men, like Homer, Alexander the Great, and Epaminondas among the ancients, and Etienne de La Boétie among the moderns, whose example may help us. But it is an art; and the very material in which it works is variable and complex and infinitely mysterious—human nature. To human nature we must keep close. '... il faut vivre entre les vivants.' We must dread any eccentricity or refinement which cuts us off from our fellow-beings. Blessed are those who chat easily with their neighbours about their sport or their buildings or their quarrels, and honestly enjoy the talk of carpenters and gardeners. To communicate is our chief business; society and friendship our chief delights; and reading, not to acquire knowledge, not to earn a living, but to extend our intercourse beyond our own time and province. Such wonders there are in the world; halcyons and undiscovered lands, men with dogs' heads and eyes in their chests, and laws and customs, it may well be, far superior to our own. Possibly we are asleep in this world; possibly there is some other which is apparent to beings with a sense which we now lack.

Here then, in spite of all contradictions and all qualifications, is something definite. These essays are an attempt to communicate a soul. On this point at least he is explicit. It is not fame that he wants; it is not that men shall quote him in years to come; he is setting up no statue in the market-place; he wishes only to communicate his soul. Communication is health; communication is

truth; communication is happiness. To share is our duty; to go down boldly and bring to light those hidden thoughts which are the most diseased; to conceal nothing; to pretend nothing; if we are ignorant to say so; if we love our friends to let them know it.

‘. . . car, comme je scay par une trop certaine expérience, il n’est aucune si douce consolation en la perte de nos amis que celle que nous apporte la science de n’avoir rien oublié à leur dire et d’avoir eu avec eux une parfaite et entière communication.

There are people who, when they travel, wrap themselves up, ‘se défendans de la contagion d’un air incogneu’ in silence and suspicion. When they dine, they must have the same food they get at home. Every sight and custom is bad unless it resembles those of their own village. They travel only to return. That is entirely the wrong way to set about it. We should start without any fixed idea where we are going to spend the night, or when we propose to come back; the journey is everything. Most necessary of all, but rarest good fortune, we should try to find before we start some man of our own sort who will go with us and to whom we can say the first thing that comes into our heads. For pleasure has no relish unless we share it. As for the risks—that we may catch cold or get a headache—it is always worth while to risk a little illness for the sake of pleasure. ‘Le plaisir est des principales espèces du profit.’ Besides if we do what we like, we always do what is good for us. Doctors and wise men may object, but let us leave doctors and wise men to their own dismal philosophy. For ourselves, who are ordinary men and women, let us return thanks to Nature for her bounty by using every one of the senses she has given us; vary our state as much as possible; turn now this side, now that, to the warmth, and relish to the full before the sun goes down the kisses of youth and the echoes of a beautiful voice singing Catullus. Every season is likeable, and wet days and fine, red wine and white, company and solitude. Even sleep, that deplorable curtailment of the joy of life, can be full of dreams; and the most common actions—a walk, a talk, solitude in one’s own orchard—can be enhanced and lit up by the association of the mind. Beauty is everywhere, and beauty is only two fingers’ breadth from goodness. So, in the name of health and

sanity, let us not dwell on the end of the journey. Let death come upon us planting our cabbages, or on horseback, or let us steal away to some cottage and there let strangers close our eyes, for a servant sobbing or the touch of a hand would break us down. Best of all, let death find us at our usual occupations, among girls and good fellows who make no protests, no lamentations; let him find us '*parmy les jeux, les festins, faceties, entretiens communs et populaires, et la musique, et des vers amoureux*'. But enough of death; it is life that matters.

It is life that emerges more and more clearly as these essays reach not their end, but their suspension in full career. It is life that becomes more and more absorbing as death draws near, one's self, one's soul, every fact of existence: that one wears silk stockings summer and winter; puts water in one's wine; has one's hair cut after dinner; must have glass to drink from; has never worn spectacles; has a loud voice; carries a switch in one's hand; bites one's tongue; fidgets with one's feet; is apt to scratch one's ears; likes meat to be high; rubs one's teeth with a napkin (thank God, they are good!); must have curtains to one's bed; and, what is rather curious, began by liking radishes, then disliked them, and now likes them again. No fact is too little to let it slip through one's fingers, and besides the interest of facts themselves there is the strange power we have of changing facts by the force of the imagination. Observe how the soul is always casting her own lights and shadows; makes the substantial hollow and the frail substantial; fills broad daylight with dreams; is as much excited by phantoms as by reality; and in the moment of death sports with a trifle. Observe, too, her duplicity, her complexity. She hears of a friend's loss and sympathizes, and yet has a bitter-sweet malicious pleasure in the sorrows of others. She believes; at the same time she does not believe. Observe her extraordinary susceptibility to impressions, especially in youth. A rich man steals because his father kept him short of money as a boy. This wall one builds not for oneself, but because one's father loved building. In short, the soul is all laced about with nerves and sympathies which affect her every action, and yet, even now in 1580, no one has any clear knowledge—such cowards we are, such lovers of the smooth conventional ways—how she works or what she is except that of all things she is the most mysterious, and one's self

the greatest monster and miracle in the world. ' . . . plus je me hante et connois, plus ma difformité m'estonne, moins je m'entens en moy.' Observe, observe perpetually, and, so long as ink and paper exist, 'sans cesse et sans travail' Montaigne will write.

But there remains one final question which, if we could make him look up from his enthralling occupation, we should like to put to this great master of the art of life. In these extraordinary volumes of short and broken, long and learned, logical and contradictory statements, we have heard the very pulse and rhythm of the soul, beating day after day, year after year, through a veil which, as time goes on, fines itself almost to transparency. Here is someone who succeeded in the hazardous enterprise of living; who served his country and lived retired; was landlord, husband, father; entertained kings, loved women, and mused for hours alone over old books. By means of perpetual experiment and observation of the subtlest he achieved at last a miraculous adjustment of all these wayward parts that constitute the human soul. He laid hold of the beauty of the world with all his fingers. He achieved happiness. If he had had to live again, he said, he would have lived the same life over. But, as we watch with absorbed interest the enthralling spectacle of a soul living openly beneath our eyes, the question frames itself, Is pleasure the end of all? Whence this overwhelming interest in the nature of the soul? Why this overmastering desire to communicate with others? Is the beauty of this world enough, or is there, elsewhere, some explanation of the mystery? To this what answer can there be? There is none. There is only one more question: 'Que scais-je?'

## Sir Walter Raleigh<sup>1</sup>

TO most of us, says Miss Hadow in her introduction to a book of selections from the prose of Sir Walter Raleigh, 'the Elizabethan Age stands for one of two things: it is the age of jewelled magnificence, of pomp and profusion and colour, of stately ceremonial and Court pageant, of poetry and drama; or it is the age of enterprise and exploration'. But though we have every reason for being grateful to Miss Hadow for her part in the production of this astonishing little book, we cannot go with her in this initial distinction. If Shakespeare, as literature is the only thing that survives in its completeness, may be held to represent the Elizabethan age, are not enterprise and exploration a part of Shakespeare? If there are some who read him without any thought save for the poetry, to most of us, we believe, the world of Shakespeare is the world of Hakluyt and of Raleigh; on that map Guiana and the River of the Plate are not very far distant or easily distinguishable from the Forest of Arden and Elsinore. The navigator and the explorer made their voyage by ship instead of by the mind, but over Hakluyt's pages broods the very same lustre of the imagination. Those vast rivers and fertile valleys, those forests of odorous trees and mines of gold and ruby, fill up the background of the plays as, in our fancy, the blue of the distant plains of America seems to lie behind the golden cross of St. Paul's and the bristling chimneys of Elizabethan London.

No man was a truer representative of this Elizabethan world than Sir Walter Raleigh. From the intrigues and splendours of the Court he sailed to an unknown land inhabited by savages; from discourse with Marlowe and Spenser he went to sea-battle with the Spaniard. Merely to read over the list of his pursuits gives one a sense of the space and opportunity of the Elizabethan age; courtier and admiral, soldier and explorer, member of Parliament and poet, musician and historian—he was all those things, and still kept such a curiosity alive in him that he must practise chemistry in his cabin when he had leisure at sea, or beg an old henhouse from the Governor of the Tower in which to

<sup>1</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, March 15th, 1917

pursue his search for 'the Great Elixir'. It is little wonder that Rumour should still be telling her stories about his cloak, his pipe with the silver bowl, his potatoes, his mahogany, his orange trees, after all these years; for though Rumour may lie, there is always good judgment in her falsehood.

When we come to read what remains of his writing—and in this little book the indispensable part of it is preserved—we get what Rumour cannot give us: the likeness of an extremely vigorous and individual mind, scarcely dominated by the 'vast and devouring space' of the centuries. It is well, perhaps, to begin by reading the last fight of the *Revenge*, the letters about Cadiz and Guiana, and that to his wife written in expectation of death, before reading the extracts from the *Historie of the World*, and to end with the preface to that work, as one leaves a church with the sound of the organ in one's ears. His adventures by sea and land, his quest of Eldorado and the great gold-mine of his dreams, his sentence of death and long imprisonment—glimpses of that 'day of a tempestuous life' are to be found in these pages. They give us some idea of its storm and its sunshine. Naturally the style of them is very different from that of the preface. They are full of hurry and turmoil, or impetuosity and self-assertiveness. He is always eager to justify his own daring, and to proclaim the supremacy of the English among other peoples. Even 'our common English soldier, leaved in haste, from following the Cart, or sitting on the shop-stall', surpasses in valour the best of Roman soldiers. Of the landing in Fayal in the year 1597 he writes, 'For I thought it to belong unto the honour of our Prince & Nation, that a few Ilanders should not think any advantage great enough, against a fleet set forth by Q. Elizabeth'; although he had to admit that 'I had more regard of reputation, in that businesse, than of safetie'.

But if we had to justify our love of these old voyagers we should not lay stress upon the boastful and magnificent strain in them; we should point, rather, to the strain of poetry—the meditative mood fostered by long days at sea, sleep and dreams under strange stars, and lonely effort in the face of death. We would recall the words of Sir Humfrey Gilbert, when the storm broke upon his ship, 'sitting abaft with a book in his hand . . . and crying (so oft as we did approach within hearing) "We are as near to Heaven

by sea as by land" '. And so Sir Walter Raleigh, whose character was subject to much criticism during his lifetime, who had been alternately exalted and debased by fortune, who had lived with the passion of a great lover, turns finally to thoughts of the littleness of all human things and to a magnanimous contemplation of the lot of mankind. His thoughts seem inspired by a knowledge of life both at its best and its worst; in the solitude of the Tower his memory is haunted by the sound of the sea. From the sea he takes his most frequent and splendid imagery. It comes naturally to him to speak of the 'Navigation of this life', of 'the Port of death, to which all winds drive us'. Our false friends, he says, 'forsake us in the first tempest of misfortune and steere away before the Sea and Winde.' So in old age we find that our joy and our woe have 'sayled out of sight'. Often he must have looked into the sky from the deck of his ship and thought how 'The Heavens are high, farr off, and unsearcheable'; and his experience as a ruler of uncivilized races must have made him consider what fame 'the boundless ambition in mortal men' is wont to leave behind it:

'They themselves would then rather have wished, to have stolen out of the world without noise, than to be put in minde, that they have purchased the report of their actions in the world, by rapine, oppression, and crueltie, by giving in spoile the innocent and labouring soul to the idle and insolent, and by having emptied the cities of the world of their ancient Inhabitants, and filled them againe with so many and so variable sorts of sorrowes.'

But although the sounds of life and the waves of the sea are constantly in his ears, so that at any moment he is ready to throw away his pen and take command of an expedition, he seems in his deepest moods to reject the show and splendour of the world, to see the vanity of gold-mines and of all expeditions save those of the soul.

'For the rest, as all fables were commonly grounded upon some true stories of other things done; so might these tales of the Griffins receive this moral. That if those men which fight against so many dangerous passages for gold, or other riches of this world, had their perfect senses . . . they would content themselves with a quiet and moderate estate.'

The thought of the passing of time and the uncertainty of the human lot was a favourite one with the Elizabethans, whose lives

were more at the mercy of fortune than ours are. In Raleigh's prose the same theme is constantly treated, but with an absence of the characteristic Elizabethan conceits, which brings it nearer to the taste of our own time; a divine unconsciousness seems to pervade it. Take this passage upon the passing of youth:

'So as who-so-ever hee bee, to whome Fortune hath beene a servant, and the Time a friend: let him but take the accompt of his memory (for wee have no other keeper of our pleasures past) and trulie examine what it hath reserved, either of beauty and youth, or foregone delights; what it hath saved, that it might last, of his dearest affections, or of whatever else the amorous Spring-time gave his thoughts of contentment, then unvaluable; and hee shall finde that all the art which his elder yeares have, can draw no other vapour out of these dissolutions, than heavie, secret, and sad sighs. . . . Onely those few blacke Swans I must except; who having had the grace to value worldly vanities at no more than their owne price; doe, by retayning the comfortable memorie of a well acted life, behold death without dread, and the grave without feare; and embrace both, as necessary guides to endlesse glorie.'

This is no sudden effort of eloquence; it is prefaced and continued by words of almost equal beauty. In its melody and strength, its natural symmetry of form, it is a perfect speech, fit for letters of gold and the echoes of cathedral aisles, or for the tenderness of noble human intercourse. It reaches us almost with the very accent of Raleigh's voice. There is a magnificence with which such a being relinquishes his hopes in life and dismisses the cares of 'this ridiculous world' which is the counterpart of his great zest in living. We hear it in the deeply burdened sigh with which he takes his farewell of his wife. 'For the rest, when you have travailled and wearied all your thoughts, over all sorts of worldly cogitations, you shall but sitt downe by sorrowe in the end.' But it is most evident in his thought upon death. The thought of death tolls all through Elizabethan literature lugubriously enough in our ears, for whom, perhaps, existence has been made less palpable by dint of much thinking and death more of a shade than a substance. But to the Elizabethans a great part of the proper conduct of life consisted in meeting the idea of death, which to them was not an idea but a person, with fortitude.



And to Raleigh in particular, death was a very definite enemy—death, 'which doth pursue us and hold us in chace from our infancy'. A true man, he says, despises death. And yet even as he says this there come to life before his eyes the 'mishapen and ouglye shapes' with which death tortures the imagination. And at last, when he has taken the idea of death to him and triumphed over it, there rises from his lips that magnificent strain of reconciliation and acknowledgment which sounds for ever in the ears of those who have heard it once: 'O eloquent, just and mightie Death! whom none could advise, thou hast perswaded: what none hath dared, thou hast done.'

## The Strange Elizabethans

THERE are few greater delights than to go back three or four hundred years and become in fancy at least an Elizabethan. That such fancies are only fancies, that this 'becoming an Elizabethan', this reading sixteenth-century writing as currently and certainly as we read our own is an illusion, is no doubt true. Very likely the Elizabethans would find our pronunciation of their language unintelligible; our fancy picture of what it pleases us to call Elizabethan life would rouse their ribald merriment. Still, the instinct that drives us to them is so strong and the freshness and vigour that blow through their pages are so sweet that we willingly run the risk of being laughed at, of being ridiculous.

And if we ask why we go further astray in this particular region of English literature than in any other, the answer is no doubt that Elizabethan prose, for all its beauty and bounty, was a very imperfect medium. It was almost incapable of fulfilling one of the offices of prose which is to make people talk, simply and naturally, about ordinary things. In an age of utilitarian prose like our own, we know exactly how people spend the hours between breakfast and bed, how they behave when they are neither one thing nor the other, neither angry nor loving, neither happy nor miserable. Poetry ignores these slighter shades; the social student can pick up hardly any facts about daily life from Shakespeare's plays; and if prose refuses to enlighten us, then one avenue of approach to the men and women of another age is blocked. Elizabethan prose, still scarcely separated off from the body of its poetry, could speak magnificently, of course, about the great themes—how life is short, and death certain; how spring is lovely, and winter horrid—perhaps, indeed, the lavish and towering periods that it raises above these simple platitudes are due to the fact that it has not cheapened itself upon trifles. But the price it pays for this soaring splendour is to be found in its awkwardness when it comes to earth—when Lady Sidney, for example, finding herself cold at nights, has to solicit the Lord Chamberlain for a better bedroom at Court. Then any housemaid of her own age

could put her case more simply and with greater force. Thus, if we go to the Elizabethan prose-writers to solidify the splendid world of Elizabethan poetry as we should go now to our biographers, novelists, and journalists to solidify the world of Pope, of Tennyson, of Conrad, we are perpetually baffled and driven from our quest. What, we ask, was the life of an ordinary man or woman in the time of Shakespeare? Even the familiar letters of the time give us little help. Sir Henry Wotton is pompous and ornate and keeps us stiffly at arm's length. Their histories resound with drums and trumpets. Their broadsheets reverberate with meditations upon death and reflections upon the immortality of the soul. Our best chance of finding them off their guard and so becoming at ease with them is to seek one of those unambitious men who haunt the outskirts of famous gatherings, listening, observing, sometimes taking a note in a book. But they are difficult to find. Gabriel Harvey perhaps, the friend of Spenser and of Sidney, might have fulfilled that function. Unfortunately the values of the time persuaded him that to write about rhetoric, to write about Thomas Smith, to write about Queen Elizabeth in Latin, was better worth doing than to record the table talk of Spenser and Sir Philip Sidney. But he possessed to some extent the modern instinct for preserving trifles, for keeping copies of letters, and for making notes of ideas that struck him in the margins of books. If we rummage among these fragments we shall, at any rate, leave the high road and perhaps hear some roar of laughter from a tavern door, where poets are drinking; or meet humble people going about their milking and their love-making without a thought that this is the great Elizabethan age, or that Shakespeare is at this moment strolling down the Strand and might tell one, if one plucked him by the sleeve, to whom he wrote the sonnets, and what he meant by *Hamlet*.

The first person whom we meet is indeed a milkmaid—Gabriel Harvey's sister Mercy. In the winter of 1574 she was milking in the fields near Saffron Walden accompanied by an old woman, when a man approached her and offered her cakes and malmsey wine. When they had eaten and drunk in a wood and the old woman had wandered off to pick up sticks, the man proceeded to explain his business. He came from Lord Surrey, a youth of about Mercy's own age—seventeen or eighteen that is—and a

married man. He had been bowling one day and had seen the milkmaid; her hat had blown off and 'she had somewhat changed her colour'. In short, Lord Surrey had fallen passionately in love with her; and sent her by the same man gloves, a silk girdle, and an enamel posy ring which he had torn from his own hat though his Aunt, Lady W——, had given it him for a very different purpose. Mercy at first stood her ground. She was a poor milkmaid, and he was a noble gentleman. But at last she agreed to meet him at her house in the village. Thus, one very misty, foggy night just before Christmas, Lord Surrey and his servant came to Saffron Walden. They peered in at the malthouse, but saw only her mother and sisters; they peeped in at the parlour, but only her brothers were there. Mercy herself was not to be seen; and 'well mired and wearied for their labour', there was nothing for it but to ride back home again. Finally, after further parleys, Mercy agreed to meet Lord Surrey in a neighbour's house alone at midnight. She found him in the little parlour 'in his doublet and hose, his points untrust, and his shirt lying round about him'. He tried to force her on to the bed; but she cried out, and the good wife, as had been agreed between them, rapped on the door and said she was sent for. Thwarted, enraged, Lord Surrey cursed and swore, 'God confound me, God confound me', and by way of lure emptied his pockets of all the money in them—thirteen shillings in shillings and testers it came to—and made her finger it. Still, however, Mercy made off, untouched, on condition that she would come again on Christmas Eve. But when Christmas Eve dawned she was up betimes and had put seven miles between her and Saffron Walden by six in the morning, though it snowed and rained so that the floods were out, and P., the servant, coming later to the place of assignation, had to pick his way through the water in pattens. So Christmas passed. And a week later, in the very nick of time to save her honour, the whole story very strangely was discovered and brought to an end. On New Year's Eve her brother Gabriel, the young fellow of Pembroke Hall, was riding back to Cambridge when he came up with a simple countryman whom he had met at his father's house. They rode on together, and after some country gossip, the man said that he had a letter for Gabriel in his pocket. Indeed, it was addressed 'To my loving brother Mr. G. H.', but when Gabriel opened it there on the

road, he found that the address was a lie. It was not from his sister Mercy, but to his sister Mercy. 'Mine Own Sweet Mercy', it began; and it was signed 'Thine more than ever his own Phil'. Gabriel could hardly control himself—'could scarcely dissemble my sudden fancies and comprimitt my inward passions'—as he read. For it was not merely a love-letter; it was more; it talked about possessing Mercy according to promise. There was also a fair English noble wrapped up in the paper. So Gabriel, doing his best to control himself before the countryman, gave him back the letter and the coin and told him to deliver them both to his sister at Saffron Walden with this message: 'To look ere she leap. She may pick out the English of it herself.' He rode on to Cambridge; he wrote a long letter to the young lord, informing him with ambiguous courtesy that the game was up. The sister of Gabriel Harvey was not to be the mistress of a married nobleman. Rather she was to be a maid, 'diligent, and trusty and tractable', in the house of Lady Smith at Audley End. Thus Mercy's romance breaks off; the clouds descend again; and we no longer see the milkmaid, the old woman, the treacherous serving-man who came with malmsey and cakes and rings and ribbons to tempt a poor girl's honour while she milked her cows.

This is probably no uncommon story; there must have been many milkmaids whose hats blew off as they milked their cows, and many lords whose hearts leapt at the sight so that they plucked the jewels from their hats and sent their servants to make treaty for them. But it is rare for the girl's own letters to be preserved or to read her own account of the story as she was made to deliver it at her brother's inquisition. Yet when we try to use her words to light up the Elizabethan field, the Elizabethan house and living-room, we are met by the usual perplexities. It is easy enough, in spite of the rain and the fog and the floods, to make a fancy piece out of the milkmaid and the meadows and the old woman wandering off to pick up sticks. Elizabethan song-writers have taught us too well the habit of that particular trick. But if we resist the impulse to make museum pieces out of our reading, Mercy herself gives us little help. She was a milkmaid, scribbling love-letters by the light of a farthing dip in an attic. Nevertheless, the sway of the Elizabethan convention was so strong, the accent of their speech was so masterful, that she bears

herself with a grace and expresses herself with a resonance that would have done credit to a woman of birth and literary training. When Lord Surrey pressed her to yield she replied:

The thing you wot of, Milord, were a great trespass towards God, a great offence to the world, a great grief to my friends, a great shame to myself, and, as I think, a great dishonour to your lordship. I have heard my father say, Virginitie is ye fairest flower in a maid's garden, and chastity ye richest dowry a poor wench can have. . . . Chastity, they say, is like unto time, which, being once lost, can no more be recovered.

Words chime and ring in her ears, as if she positively enjoyed the act of writing. When she wishes him to know that she is only a poor country girl and no fine lady like his wife, she exclaims, 'Good Lord, that you should seek after so bare and country stuff abroad, that have so costly and courtly wares at home!' She even breaks into a jog-trot of jingling rhyme, far less sonorous than her prose, but proof that to write was an art, not merely a means of conveying facts. And if she wants to be direct and forcible, the proverbs she has heard in her father's house come to her pen, the biblical imagery runs in her ears: 'And then were I, poor wench, cast up for hawk's meat, to mine utter undoing, and my friends' exceeding grief'. In short, Mercy the milkmaid writes a natural and noble style, which is incapable of vulgarity, and equally incapable of intimacy. Nothing, one feels, would have been easier for Mercy than to read her lover a fine discourse upon the vanity of grandeur, the loveliness of chastity, the vicissitudes of fortune. But of emotion as between one particular Mercy and one particular Philip, there is no trace. And when it comes to dealing exactly in a few words with some mean object—when, for example, the wife of Sir Henry Sidney, the daughter of the Duke of Northumberland, has to state her claim to a better room to sleep in, she writes for all the world like an illiterate servant girl who can neither form her letters nor spell her words nor make one sentence follow smoothly after another. She haggles, she niggles, she wears our patience down with her repetitions and her prolixities. Hence it comes about that we know very little about Mercy Harvey, the milkmaid, who wrote so well, or Mary Sidney, daughter to the Duke of Northumberland, who wrote so badly. The background of Elizabethan life eludes us.

But let us follow Gabriel Harvey to Cambridge, in case we can there pick up something humble and colloquial that will make these strange Elizabethans more familiar to us. Gabriel, having discharged his duty as a brother, seems to have given himself up to the life of an intellectual young man with his way to make in the world. He worked so hard and he played so little that he made himself unpopular with his fellows. For it was obviously difficult to combine an intense interest in the future of English poetry and the capacity of the English language with card-playing, bear-baiting, and such diversions. Nor could he apparently accept everything that Aristotle said as gospel truth. But with congenial spirits he argued, it is clear, hour by hour, night after night, about poetry, and metre, and the raising of the despised English speech and the meagre English literature to a station among the great tongues and literatures of the world. We are sometimes made to think, as we listen, of such arguments as might now be going forward in the new Universities of America. The young English poets speak with a bold yet uneasy arrogance—'England, since it was England, never bred more honourable minds, more adventurous hearts, more valorous hands, or more excellent wits, than of late'. Yet, to be English is accounted a kind of crime—'nothing is reputed so contemptible and so basely and vilely accounted of as whatsoever is taken for English'. And if, in their hopes for the future and their sensitiveness to the opinion of older civilizations, the Elizabethans show much the same susceptibility that sometimes puzzles us among the younger countries today, the sense that broods over them of what is about to happen, of an undiscovered land on which they are about to set foot, is much like the excitement that science stirs in the minds of imaginative English writers of our own time. Yet however stimulating it is to think that we hear the stir and strife of tongues in Cambridge rooms about the year 1570, it has to be admitted that to read Harvey's pages methodically is almost beyond the limits of human patience. The words seem to run red-hot, molten, hither and thither, until we cry out in anguish for the boon of some meaning to set its stamp on them. He takes the same idea and repeats it over and over again:

In the sovereign workmanship of Nature herself, what garden of flowers without weeds? what orchard of trees without worms?

what field of corn without cockle? what pond of fishes without frogs? what sky of light without darkness? what mirror of knowledge without ignorance? what man of earth without frailty? what commodity of the world without discommodity?

It is interminable. As we go round and round like a horse in a mill, we perceive that we are thus clogged with sound because we are reading what we should be hearing. The amplifications and the repetitions, the emphasis like that of a fist pounding the edge of a pulpit, are for the benefit of the slow and sensual ear which loves to dally over sense and luxuriate in sound—the ear which brings in, along with the spoken word, the look of the speaker and his gestures, which gives a dramatic value to what he says and adds to the crest of an extravagance some modulation which makes the word wing its way to the precise spot aimed at in the hearer's heart. Hence, when we lay Harvey's diatribes against Nash or his letters to Spenser upon poetry under the light of the eye alone, we can hardly make headway and lose our sense of any definite direction. We grasp any simple fact that floats to the surface as a drowning man grasps a plank—that the carrier was called Mrs. Kerke, that Perne kept a cub for his pleasure in his rooms at Peterhouse; that 'Your last letter . . . was delivered me at mine hostesses by the fireside, being fast hedged in round about on every side with a company of honest, good fellows, and at that time reasonable, honest quaffers'; that Greene died begging Mistress Isam 'for a penny pot of Malmsey', had borrowed her husband's shirt when his own was awashing, and was buried yesterday in the new churchyard near Bedlam at a cost of six shillings and fourpence. Light seems to dawn upon the darkness. But no; just as we think to lay hands on Shakespeare's coat-tails, to hear the very words rapped out as Spenser spoke them, up rise the fumes of Harvey's eloquence and we are floated off again into disputation and eloquence, windy, wordy, voluminous, and obsolete. How, we ask, as we slither over the pages, can we ever hope to come to grips with these Elizabethans? And then, turning, skipping and glancing, something fitfully and doubtfully emerges from the violent pages, the voluminous arguments—the figure of a man, the outlines of a face, somebody who is not 'an Elizabethan' but an interesting, complex, and individual human being.



We know him, to begin with, from his dealings with his sister. We see him riding to Cambridge, a fellow of his college, when she was milking with poor old women in the fields. We observe with amusement his sense of the conduct that befits the sister of Gabriel Harvey, the Cambridge scholar. Education had put a great gulf between him and his family. He rode to Cambridge from a house in a village street where his father made ropes and his mother worked in the malthouse. Yet though his lowly birth and the consciousness that he had his way to make in the world made him severe with his sister, fawning to the great, uneasy and self-centred and ostentatious, it never made him ashamed of his family. The father who could send three sons to Cambridge and was so little ashamed of his craft that he had himself carved making ropes at his work and the carving let in above his fireplace, was no ordinary man. The brothers who followed Gabriel to Cambridge and were his best allies there, were brothers to be proud of. He could be proud of Mercy even, whose beauty could make a great nobleman pluck the jewel from his hat. He was undoubtedly proud of himself. It was the pride of a self-made man who must read when other people are playing cards, who owns no undue allegiance to authority and will contradict Aristotle himself, that made him unpopular at Cambridge and almost cost him his degree. But it was an unfortunate chance that led him thus early in life to defend his rights and insist upon his merits. Moreover, since it was true—since he was abler, quicker, and more learned than other people, handsome in person too, as even his enemies could not deny ('a smudge piece of a handsome fellow it hath been in his days' Nash admitted) he had reason to think that he deserved success and was denied it only by the jealousies and conspiracies of his colleagues. For a time, by dint of much caballing and much dwelling upon his own deserts, he triumphed over his enemies in the matter of the degree. He delivered lectures. He was asked to dispute before the court when Queen Elizabeth came to Audley End. He even drew her favourable attention. 'He lookt something like an Italian', she said when he was brought to her notice. But the seeds of his downfall were visible even in his moment of triumph. He had no self-respect, no self-control. He made himself ridiculous and his friends uneasy. When we read how he dressed himself up and

'came ruffling it out huffy tuffy in his suit of velvet' how uneasy he was, at one moment cringing, at another 'making no bones to take the wall of Sir Phillip Sidney', now flirting with the ladies, now 'putting bawdy riddles to them', how when the Queen praised him he was beside himself with joy and talked the English of Saffron Walden with an Italian accent, we can imagine how his enemies jeered and his friends blushed. And so, for all his merits, his decline began. He was not taken into Lord Leicester's service; he was not made Public Orator; he was not given the Mastership of Trinity Hall. But there was one society in which he succeeded. In the small, smoky rooms where Spenser and other young men discussed poetry and language and the future of English literature, Harvey was not laughed at. Harvey, on the contrary, was taken very seriously. To friends like these he seemed as capable of greatness as any of them. He too might be one of those destined to make English literature illustrious. His passion for poetry was disinterested. His learning was profound. When he held forth upon quantity and metre, upon what the Greeks had written and the Italians, and what the English might write, no doubt he created for Spenser that atmosphere of hope and ardent curiosity spiced with sound learning that serves to spur the imagination of a young writer and to make each fresh poem as it is written seem the common property of a little band of adventurers set upon the same quest. It was thus that Spenser saw him:

Harvey, the happy above happiest men,  
 I read: that, sitting like a looker-on  
 Of this world's stage, doest note, with critic pen,  
 The sharp dislikes of each condition.

Poets need such 'lookers-on'; someone who discriminates from a watch-tower above the battle; who warns; who foresees. It must have been pleasant for Spenser to listen as Harvey talked; and then to cease to listen, to let the vehement, truculent voice run on, while he slipped from theory to practice and made up a few lines of his own poetry in his head. But the looker-on may sit too long and hold forth too curiously and domineeringly for his own health. He may make his theories fit too tight to accommodate the formlessness of life. Thus when Harvey ceased to theorize and

tried to practise there issued nothing but a thin dribble of arid and unappetizing verse or a copious flow of unctuous and servile eulogy. He failed to be a poet as he failed to be a statesman, as he failed to be a professor, as he failed to be a Master, as he failed, it might seem, in everything that he undertook, save that he had won the friendship of Spenser and Sir Philip Sidney.

But, happily, Harvey left behind him a commonplace book; he had the habit of making notes in the margins of books as he read. Looking from one to the other, from his public self to his private, we see his face lit from both sides, and the expression changes as it changes so seldom upon the face of the Elizabethans. We detect another Harvey lurking behind the superficial Harvey, shading him with doubt and effort and despondency. For, luckily, the commonplace book was small; the margins even of an Elizabethan folio narrow; Harvey was forced to be brief, and because he wrote only for his own eye at the command of some sharp memory or experience he seems to write as if he were talking to himself. That is true, he seems to say; or that reminds me, or again: If only I had done this. We thus become aware of a conflict between the Harvey who blundered among men and the Harvey who sat wisely at home among his books. The one who acts and suffers brings his case to the one who reads and thinks for advice and consolation.

Indeed, he had need of both. From the first his life was full of conflict and difficulty. Harvey the rope-maker's son might put a brave face on it, but still in the society of gentlemen the lowness of his birth galled him. Think, then, the sedentary Harvey counselled him, of all those unknown people who have nevertheless triumphed. Think of 'Alexander, an Unexpert Youth'; think of David, 'a forward stripling, but vanquished a huge Giant'; think of Judith and of Pope Joan and their exploits; think, above all, of that 'gallant virago . . . Joan of Arc, a most worthy, valiant young wench . . . what may not an industrious and politic man do . . . when a lusty adventurous wench might thus prevail?' And then it seems as if the smart young men at Cambridge twitted the rope-maker's son for his lack of skill in the gentlemanly arts. 'Leave writing', Gabriel counselled him, 'which consumeth unreasonable much time. . . . You have already plagued yourself this way.' Make yourself master of the arts of eloquence and

persuasion. Go into the world. Learn swordsmanship, riding, and shooting. All three may be learnt in a week. And then the ambitious but uneasy youth began to find the other sex attractive and asked advice of his wise and sedentary brother in the conduct of his love affairs. Manners, the other Harvey was of opinion, are of the utmost importance in dealing with women; one must be discreet, self-controlled. A gentleman, this counsellor continued, is known by his 'Good entertainment of Ladies and gentlewomen. No salutation, without much respect and ceremony'—a reflection inspired no doubt by the memory of some snub received at Audley End. Health and the care of the body are of the utmost importance. 'We scholars make an Ass of our body and wit.' One must 'leap out of bed lustily, every morning in ye whole year'. One must be sparing in one's diet, and active, and take regular exercise, like brother H., 'who never failed to breathe his hound once a day at least'. There must be no 'buzzing or musing'. A learned man must also be a man of the world. Make it your 'daily charge' 'to exercise, to laugh; to proceed boldly'. And if your tormentors brawl and rail and scoff and mock at you, the best answer is 'a witty and pleasant Ironie'. In any case, do not complain. 'It is gross folly, and a vile Sign of a wayward and forward disposition, to be eftsoons complaining of this, or that, to small purpose.' And if as time goes on without preferment, one cannot pay one's bills, one is thrust into prison, one has to bear the taunts and insults of landladies, still remember 'Glad poverty is no poverty'; and if, as time passes and the struggle increases, it seems as if 'Life is warfare', if sometimes the beaten man has to own, 'But for hope ye Hart would burst', still his sage counsellor in the study will not let him throw up the sponge. 'He beareth his misery best, that hideth it most' he told himself.

So runs the dialogue that we invent between the two Harveys—Harvey the active and Harvey the passive, Harvey the foolish and Harvey the wise. And it seems on the surface that the two halves, for all their counselling together, made but a sorry business of the whole. For the young man who had ridden off to Cambridge full of conceit and hope and good advice to his sister returned empty-handed to his native village in the end. He dwindled out his last long years in complete obscurity at Saffron Walden. He occupied himself superficially by practising his skill

as a doctor among the poor of the neighbourhood. He lived in the utmost poverty off buttered roots and sheep's trotters. But even so he had his consolations, he cherished his dreams. As he pottered about his garden in the old black velvet suit, purloined, Nash says, from a saddle for which he had not paid, his thoughts were all of power and glory; of Stukeley and Drake; of 'the winners of gold and the wearers of gold'. Memories he had in abundance—'The remembrance of best things will soon pass out of memory; if it be not often renewed and revived', he wrote. But there was some eager stir in him, some lust for action and glory and life and adventure that forbade him to dwell in the past. 'The present tense only to be regarded' is one of his notes. Nor did he drug himself with the dust of scholarship. Books he loved as a true reader loves them, not as trophies to be hung up for display, but as living beings that 'must be meditated, practised and incorporated into my body and soul'. A singularly humane view of learning survived in the breast of the old and disappointed scholar. 'The only brave way to learn all things with no study and much pleasure', he remarked. Dreams of the winners of gold and the wearers of gold, dreams of action and power, fantastic though they were in an old beggar who could not pay his reckoning, who pressed simples and lived off buttered roots in a cottage, kept life in him when his flesh had withered and his skin was 'riddled and crumpled like a piece of burnt parchment'. He had his triumph in the end. He survived both his friends and his enemies—Spenser and Sidney, Nash and Perne. He lived to a very great age for an Elizabethan, to eighty-one or eighty-two; and when we say that Harvey lived we mean that he quarrelled and was tiresome and ridiculous and struggled and failed and had a face like ours—a changing, a variable, a human face.

## Rambling Round Evelyn

SHOULD you wish to make sure that your birthday will be celebrated three hundred years hence, your best course is undoubtedly to keep a diary. Only first be certain that you have the courage to lock your genius in a private book and the humour to gloat over a fame that will be yours only in the grave. For the good diarist writes either for himself alone or for a posterity so distant that it can safely hear every secret and justly weigh every motive. For such an audience there is need neither of affectation nor of restraint. Sincerity is what they ask, detail, and volume; skill with the pen comes in conveniently, but brilliance is not necessary; genius is a hindrance even; and should you know your business and do it manfully, posterity will let you off mixing with great men, reporting famous affairs, or having lain with the first ladies in the land.

The diary, for whose sake we are remembering the three-hundredth anniversary of the birth of John Evelyn,<sup>1</sup> is a case in point. It is sometimes composed like a memoir, sometimes jotted down like a calendar; but he never used its pages to reveal the secrets of his heart, and all that he wrote might have been read aloud in the evening with a calm conscience to his children. If we wonder, then, why we still trouble to read what we must consider the uninspired work of a good man we have to confess, first that diaries are always diaries, books, that is, that we read in convalescence, on horseback, in the grip of death; second, that this reading, about which so many fine things have been said, is for the most part mere dreaming and idling; lying in a chair with a book; watching the butterflies on the dahlias; a profitless occupation which no critic has taken the trouble to investigate, and on whose behalf only the moralist can find a good word to say. For he will allow it to be an innocent employment; and happiness, he will add, though derived from trivial sources, has probably done more to prevent human beings from changing their religions and killing their kings than either philosophy or the pulpit.

<sup>1</sup> Written in 1920

It may be well, indeed, before reading much further in Evelyn's book, to decide where it is that our modern view of happiness differs from his. Ignorance, surely, ignorance is at the bottom of it; his ignorance and our comparative erudition. No one can read the story of Evelyn's foreign travels without envying in the first place his simplicity of mind, in the second his activity. To take a simple example of the difference between us—that butterfly will sit motionless on the dahlia while the gardener trundles his barrow past it, but let him flick the wings with the shadow of a rake, and off it flies, up it goes, instantly on the alert. So, we may reflect, a butterfly sees but does not hear; and here no doubt we are much on a par with Evelyn. But as for going into the house to fetch a knife and with that knife dissecting a Red Admiral's head, as Evelyn would have done, no sane person in the twentieth century would entertain such a project for a second. Individually we may know as little as Evelyn, but collectively we know so much that there is little incentive to venture on private discoveries. We seek the encyclopaedia, not the scissors; and know in two minutes not only more than was known to Evelyn in his lifetime, but that the mass of knowledge is so vast that it is scarcely worth while to possess a single crumb. Ignorant, yet justly confident that with his own hands he might advance not merely his private knowledge but the knowledge of mankind, Evelyn dabbled in all the arts and sciences, ran about the Continent for ten years, gazed with unflagging gusto upon hairy women and rational dogs, and drew inferences and framed speculations which are now only to be matched by listening to the talk of old women round the village pump. The moon, they say, is so much larger than usual this autumn that no mushrooms will grow, and the carpenter's wife will be brought to bed of twins. So Evelyn, Fellow of the Royal Society, a gentleman of the highest culture and intelligence, carefully noted all comets and portents, and thought it a sinister omen when a whale came up the Thames. In 1658, too, a whale had been seen. 'That year died Cromwell.' Nature, it seems, was determined to stimulate the devotion of her seventeenth-century admirers by displays of violence and eccentricity from which she now refrains. There were storms, floods, and droughts; the Thames frozen hard; comets flaring in the sky. If a cat so much as kittened in Evelyn's

bed the kitten was inevitably gifted with eight legs, six ears, two bodies, and two tails.

But to return to happiness. It sometimes appears that if there is an insoluble difference between our ancestors and ourselves it is that we draw our happiness from different sources. We rate the same things at different values. Something of this we may ascribe to their ignorance and our knowledge. But are we to suppose that ignorance alters the nerves and the affections? Are we to believe that it would have been an intolerable penance for us to live familiarly with the Elizabethans? Should we have found it necessary to leave the room because of Shakespeare's habits, and to have refused Queen Elizabeth's invitation to dinner? Perhaps so. For Evelyn was a sober man of unusual refinement, and yet he pressed into a torture chamber as we crowd to see the lions fed.

... they first bound his wrists with a strong rope or small cable, and one end of it to an iron ring made fast to the wall about four feet from the floor, and then his feet with another cable, fastened about five feet farther than his utmost length to another ring on the floor of the room. Thus suspended, and yet lying but aslant, they slid a horse of wood under the rope which bound his feet, which so exceedingly stiffened it, as severed the fellow's joints in miserable sort, drawing him out at length in an extraordinary manner, he having only a pair of linen drawers upon his naked body...

And so on. Evelyn watched this to the end, and then remarked that 'the spectacle was so uncomfortable that I was not able to stay the sight of another', as we might say that the lions growl so loud and the sight of raw meat is so unpleasant that we will now visit the penguins. Allowing for his discomfort, there is enough discrepancy between his view of pain and ours to make us wonder whether we see any fact with the same eyes, marry any woman from the same motives, or judge any conduct by the same standards. To sit passive when muscles tore and bones cracked, not to flinch when the wooden horse was raised higher and the executioner fetched a horn and poured two buckets of water down the man's throat, to suffer this iniquity on a suspicion of robbery which the man denied—all this seems to put Evelyn in one of those cages where we still mentally seclude the riff-raff of White-



chapel. Only it is obvious that we have somehow got it wrong. If we could maintain that our susceptibility to suffering and love of justice were proof that all our humane instincts were as highly developed as these, then we could say that the world improves, and we with it. But let us get on with the diary.

In 1652, when it seemed that things had settled down unhappily enough, 'all being entirely in the rebels' hands', Evelyn returned to England with his wife, his Tables of Veins and Arteries, his Venetian glass and the rest of his curiosities, to lead the life of a country gentleman of strong Royalist sympathies at Deptford. What with going to church and going to town, settling his accounts and planting his garden—'I planted the orchard at Sayes Court; new moon, wind west'—his time was spent much as ours is. But there was one difference which it is difficult to illustrate by a single quotation, because the evidence is scattered all about in little insignificant phrases. The general effect of them is that he used his eyes. The visible world was always close to him. The visible world has receded so far from us that to hear all this talk of buildings and gardens, statues and carving, as if the look of things assailed one out of doors as well as in, and were not confined to a few small canvases hung upon the wall, seems strange. No doubt there are a thousand excuses for us; but hitherto we have been finding excuses for him. Wherever there was a picture to be seen by Julio Romano, Polydore, Guido, Raphael, or Tintoretto, a finely built house, a prospect, or a garden nobly designed, Evelyn stopped his coach to look at it, and opened his diary to record his opinion. On August 27, Evelyn, with Dr. Wren and others, was in St. Paul's surveying 'the general decay of that ancient and venerable church'; held with Dr. Wren another judgement from the rest; and had a mind to build it with 'a noble cupola, a form of church building not as yet known in England but of wonderful grace', in which Dr. Wren concurred. Six days later the Fire of London altered their plans. It was Evelyn again who, walking by himself, chanced to look in at the window of 'a poor solitary thatched house in a field in our parish', there saw a young man carving at a crucifix, was overcome with an enthusiasm which does him the utmost credit, and carried Grinling Gibbons and his carving to Court.

Indeed, it is all very well to be scrupulous about the sufferings

of worms and sensitive to the dues of servant girls, but how pleasant also if, with shut eyes, one could call up street after street of beautiful houses. A flower is red; the apples rosy-gilt in the afternoon sun; a picture has charm, especially as it displays the character of a grandfather and dignifies a family descended from such a scowl; but these are scattered fragments—little relics of beauty in a world that has grown indescribably drab. To our charge of cruelty Evelyn might well reply by pointing to Bayswater and the purlieu of Clapham; and if he should assert that nothing now has character or conviction, that no farmer in England sleeps with an open coffin at his bedside to remind him of death, we could not retort effectually offhand. True, we like the country. Evelyn never looked at the sky.

But to return. After the Restoration Evelyn emerged in full possession of a variety of accomplishments which in our time of specialists seems remarkable enough. He was employed on public business; he was Secretary to the Royal Society; he wrote plays and poems; he was the first authority upon trees and gardens in England; he submitted a design for the rebuilding of London; he went into the question of smoke and its abatement—the lime trees in St. James's Park being, it is said, the result of his cogitations; he was commissioned to write a history of the Dutch war—in short, he completely outdid the Squire of *The Princess*, whom in many respects he anticipated—

A lord of fat prize-oxen and of sheep,  
A raiser of huge melons and of pine,  
A patron of some thirty charities,  
A pamphleteer on guano and on grain,  
A quarter-sessions chairman abler none.

All that he was, and shared with Sir Walter another characteristic which Tennyson does not mention. He was, we cannot help suspecting, something of a bore, a little censorious, a little patronizing, a little too sure of his own merits, and a little obtuse to those of other people. Or what is the quality, or absence of quality, that checks our sympathies? Partly, perhaps, it is due to some inconsistency which it would be harsh to call by so strong a name as hypocrisy. Though he deplored the vices of his age he could never keep away from the centre of them. 'The luxurious

dallying and profaneness' of the Court, the sight of 'Mrs. Nelly' looking over her garden wall and holding 'very familiar discourse' with King Charles on the green walk below, caused him acute disgust; yet he could never decide to break with the Court and retire to 'my poor but quiet villa', which was of course the apple of his eye and one of the show-places in England. Then, though he loved his daughter Mary, his grief at her death did not prevent him from counting the number of empty coaches drawn by six horses apiece that attended her funeral. His women friends combined virtue with beauty to such an extent that we can hardly credit them with wit into the bargain. Poor Mrs. Godolphin at least, whom he celebrated in a sincere and touching biography, 'loved to be at funerals' and chose habitually 'the dryest and leanest morsels of meat', which may be the habits of an angel but do not present her friendship with Evelyn in an alluring light. But it is Pepys who sums up our case against Evelyn; Pepys who said of him after a long morning's entertainment: 'In fine a most excellent person he is and must be allowed a little for a little conceitedness; but he may well be so, being a man so much above others.' The words exactly hit the mark, 'A most excellent person he was'; but a little conceited.

Pepys it is who prompts us to another reflection, inevitable, unnecessary, perhaps unkind. Evelyn was no genius. His writing is opaque rather than transparent; we see no depths through it, nor any very secret movements of mind or heart. He can neither make us hate a regicide nor love Mrs. Godolphin beyond reason. But he writes a diary; and he writes it supremely well. Even as we drowse, somehow or other the bygone gentleman sets up, through three centuries, a perceptible tingle of communication, so that without laying stress on anything in particular, stopping to dream, stopping to laugh, stopping merely to look, we are yet taking notice all the time. His garden, for example—how delightful is his disparagement of it, and how acid his criticism of the gardens of others. Then, we may be sure, the hens at Sayes Court laid the very best eggs in England; and when the Tsar drove a wheelbarrow through his hedge, what a catastrophe it was; and we can guess how Mrs. Evelyn dusted and polished; and how Evelyn himself grumbled; and how punctilious and efficient and trustworthy he was; how ready to give advice; how ready

to read his own works aloud; and how affectionate, withal, lamenting bitterly, but not effusively—for the man with the long-drawn sensitive face was never that—the death of the little prodigy Richard, and recording how ‘after evening prayers was my child buried near the rest of his brothers—my very dear children’. He was not an artist; no phrases linger in the mind; no paragraphs build themselves up in memory; but as an artistic method this of going on with the day’s story circumstantially, bringing in people who will never be mentioned again, leading up to crises which never take place, introducing Sir Thomas Browne but never letting him speak, has its fascination. All through his pages good men, bad men, celebrities, nonentities are coming into the room and going out again. The greater number we scarcely notice; the door shuts upon them and they disappear. But now and again the sight of a vanishing coat-tail suggests more than a whole figure sitting still in a full light. Perhaps it is that we catch them unawares. Little they think that for three hundred years and more they will be looked at in the act of jumping a gate, or observing, like the old Marquis of Argyle, that the turtle doves in the aviary are owls. Our eyes wander from one to the other; our affections settle here or there—on hot-tempered Captain Wray, for instance, who was choleric, had a dog that killed a goat, was for shooting the goat’s owner, was for shooting his horse when it fell down a precipice; on M. Saladine; on M. Saladine’s daughter; on Captain Wray lingering at Geneva to make love to M. Saladine’s daughter; on Evelyn himself most of all, grown old, walking in his garden at Wotton, his sorrows smoothed out, his grandson doing him credit, the Latin quotations falling pat from his lips, his trees flourishing, and the butterflies flying and flaunting on his dahlias too.

## The Duchess of Newcastle<sup>1</sup>

ALL I desire is fame', wrote Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle. And while she lived her wish was granted. Garish in her dress, eccentric in her habits, chaste in her conduct, coarse in her speech, she succeeded during her lifetime in drawing upon herself the ridicule of the great and the applause of the learned. But the last echoes of that clamour have now all died away; she lives only in the few splendid phrases that Lamb scattered upon her tomb; her poems, her plays, her philosophies, her orations, her discourses—all those folios and quartos in which, she protested, her real life was shrined—moulder in the gloom of public libraries, or are decanted into tiny thimbles which hold six drops of their profusion. Even the curious student, inspired by the words of Lamb, quails before the mass of her mausoleum, peers in, looks about him, and hurries out again, shutting the door.

But that hasty glance has shown him the outlines of a memorable figure. Born (it is conjectured) in 1624, Margaret was the youngest child of a Thomas Lucas, who died when she was an infant, and her upbringing was due to her mother, a lady of remarkable character, of majestic grandeur and beauty 'beyond the ruin of time'. 'She was very skilful in leases, and setting of lands and court keeping, ordering of stewards, and the like affairs.' The wealth which thus accrued she spent, not on marriage portions, but on generous and delightful pleasures, 'out of an opinion that if she bred us with needy necessity it might chance to create in us sharking qualities'. Her eight sons and daughters were never beaten, but reasoned with, finely and gaily dressed, and allowed no conversation with servants, not because they are servants but because servants 'are for the most part ill-bred as well as meanly born'. The daughters were taught the usual accomplishments 'rather for formality than for benefit', it being their mother's opinion that character, happiness, and honesty were of greater

<sup>1</sup> *The Life of William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, Etc.*, edited by C. H. Firth; *Poems and Fancies*, by the Duchess of Newcastle; *The World's Olio, Orations of divers Sorts Accommodated to Divers Places; Female Orations; Plays; Philosophical Letters*, etc., etc.

value to a woman than fiddling and singing, or 'the prating of several languages'.

Already Margaret was eager to take advantage of such indulgence to gratify certain tastes. Already she liked reading better than needlework, dressing and 'inventing fashions' better than reading, and writing best of all. Sixteen paper books of no title, written in straggling letters, for the impetuosity of her thought always outdid the pace of her fingers, testify to the use she made of her mother's liberality. The happiness of their home life had other results as well. They were a devoted family. Long after they were married, Margaret noted, these handsome brothers and sisters, with their well-proportioned bodies, their clear complexions, brown hair, sound teeth, 'tunable voices', and plain way of speaking, kept themselves 'in a flock together'. The presence of strangers silenced them. But when they were alone, whether they walked in Spring Gardens or Hyde Park, or had music, or supped in barges upon the water, their tongues were loosed and they made 'very merry amongst themselves, . . . judging, condemning, approving, commending, as they thought good'.

The happy family life had its effect upon Margaret's character. As a child, she would walk for hours alone, musing and contemplating and reasoning with herself of 'everything her senses did present'. She took no pleasure in activity of any kind. Toys did not amuse her, and she could neither learn foreign languages nor dress as other people did. Her great pleasure was to invent dresses for herself, which nobody else was to copy, 'for', she remarks, 'I always took delight in a singularity, even in accoutrements of habits'.

Such a training, at once so cloistered and so free, should have bred a lettered old maid, glad of her seclusion, and the writer perhaps of some volume of letters or translations from the classics, which we should still quote as proof of the cultivation of our ancestresses. But there was a wild streak in Margaret, a love of finery and extravagance and fame, which was for ever upsetting the orderly arrangements of nature. When she heard that the Queen, since the outbreak of the Civil War, had fewer maids-of-honour than usual, she had 'a great desire' to become one of them. Her mother let her go against the judgement of the rest of the family, who, knowing that she had never left home and had

scarcely been beyond their sight, justly thought that she might behave at Court to her disadvantage. 'Which indeed I did', Margaret confessed; 'for I was so bashful when I was out of my mother's, brothers', and sisters' sight that . . . I durst neither look up with my eyes, nor speak, nor be any way sociable, insomuch as I was thought a natural fool.' The courtiers laughed at her; and she retaliated in the obvious way. People were censorious; men were jealous of brains in a woman; women suspected intellect in their own sex; and what other lady, she might justly ask, pondered as she walked on the nature of matter and whether snails have teeth? But the laughter galled her, and she begged her mother to let her come home. This being refused, wisely as the event turned out, she stayed on for two years (1643-45), finally going with the Queen to Paris, and there, among the exiles who came to pay their respects to the Court, was the Marquis of Newcastle. To the general amazement, the princely nobleman, who had led the King's forces to disaster with indomitable courage but little skill, fell in love with the shy, silent, strangely dressed maid-of-honour. It was not 'amorous love, but honest, honourable love', according to Margaret. She was no brilliant match; she had gained a reputation for prudery and eccentricity. What, then, could have made so great a nobleman fall at her feet? The onlookers were full of derision, disparagement, and slander. 'I fear', Margaret wrote to the Marquis, 'others foresee we shall be unfortunate, though we see it not ourselves, or else there would not be such pains to untie the knot of our affections.' Again, 'Saint Germain is a place of much slander, and thinks I send too often to you'. 'Pray consider', she warned him, 'that I have enemies.' But the match was evidently perfect. The Duke, with his love of poetry and music and play-writing, his interest in philosophy, his belief 'that nobody knew or could know the cause of anything', his romantic and generous temperament, was naturally drawn to a woman who wrote poetry herself, was also a philosopher of the same way of thinking, and lavished upon him not only the admiration of a fellow-artist, but the gratitude of a sensitive creature who had been shielded and succoured by his extraordinary magnanimity. 'He did approve', she wrote, 'of those bashful fears which many condemned, . . . and though I did dread marriage and shunned men's company as much as I

could, yet I . . . had not the power to refuse him.' She kept him company during the long years of exile; she entered with sympathy, if not with understanding, into the conduct and acquirements of those horses which he trained to such perfection that the Spaniards crossed themselves and cried 'Miraculo!' as they witnessed their corvets, volteos, and pirouettes; she believed that the horses even made a 'trampling action' for joy when he came into the stables; she pleaded his cause in England during the Protectorate; and, when the Restoration made it possible for them to return to England, they lived together in the depths of the country in the greatest seclusion and perfect contentment, scribbling plays, poems, philosophies, greeting each other's works with raptures of delight, and confabulating, doubtless, upon such marvels of the natural world as chance threw their way. They were laughed at by their contemporaries; Horace Walpole sneered at them. But there can be no doubt that they were perfectly happy.

For now Margaret could apply herself uninterruptedly to her writing. She could devise fashions for herself and her servants. She could scribble more and more furiously with fingers that became less and less able to form legible letters. She could even achieve the miracle of getting her plays acted in London and her philosophies humbly perused by men of learning. There they stand, in the British Museum, volume after volume, swarming with a diffused, uneasy, contorted vitality. Order, continuity, the logical development of her argument are all unknown to her. No fears impede her. She has the irresponsibility of a child and the arrogance of a Duchess. The wildest fancies come to her, and she canters away on their backs. We seem to hear her, as the thoughts boil and bubble, calling to John, who sat with a pen in his hand next-door, to come quick, 'John, John, I conceive!' And down it goes—whatever it may be; sense or nonsense; some thought on women's education—'Women live like Bats or Owls, labour like Beasts, and die like Worms, . . . the best bred women are those whose minds are civilest'; some speculation that had struck her, perhaps, walking that afternoon alone—why 'hogs have the measles', why 'dogs that rejoice swing their tails', or what the stars are made of, or what this chrysalis is that her maid has brought her, and she keeps warm in a corner of her room. On



and on, from subject to subject she flies, never stopping to correct, 'for there is more pleasure in making than in mending', talking aloud to herself of all those matters that filled her brain to her perpetual diversion—of wars, and boarding-schools, and cutting down trees, of grammar and morals, of monsters and the British, whether opium in small quantities is good for lunatics, why it is that musicians are mad. Looking upwards, she speculates still more ambitiously upon the nature of the moon, and if the stars are blazing jellies; looking downwards she wonders if the fishes know that the sea is salt; opines that our heads are full of fairies, 'dear to God as we are'; muses whether there are not other worlds than ours, and reflects that the next ship may bring us word of a new one. In short, 'we are in utter darkness'. Meanwhile, what a rapture is thought!

As the vast books appeared from the stately retreat at Welbeck the usual censors made the usual objections, and had to be answered, despised, or argued with, as her mood varied, in the preface to every work. They said, among other things, that her books were not her own, because she used learned terms, and 'wrote of many matters outside her ken'. She flew to her husband for help, and he answered, characteristically, that the Duchess 'had never conversed with any professed scholar in learning except her brother and myself'. The Duke's scholarship, moreover, was of a peculiar nature. 'I have lived in the great world a great while, and have thought of what has been brought to me by the senses, more than was put into me by learned discourse; for I do not love to be led by the nose, by authority, and old authors; *ipse dixit* will not serve my turn.' And then she takes up the pen and proceeds, with the impetuosity and indiscretion of a child, to assure the world that her ignorance is of the finest quality imaginable. She has only seen Des Cartes and Hobbes, not questioned them; she did indeed ask Mr. Hobbes to dinner, but he could not come; she often does not listen to a word that is said to her; she does not know any French, though she lived abroad for five years; she has only read the old philosophers in Mr. Stanley's account of them; of Des Cartes she has read but half of his work on *Passion*; and of Hobbes only 'the little book called *De Cive*', all of which is infinitely to the credit of her native wit, so abundant that outside succour pained it, so honest that

it would not accept help from others. It was from the plain of complete ignorance, the untilled field of her own consciousness, that she proposed to erect a philosophic system that was to oust all others. The results were not altogether happy. Under the pressure of such vast structures, her natural gift, the fresh and delicate fancy which had led her in her first volume to write charmingly of Queen Mab and fairyland, was crushed out of existence.

The palace of the Queen wherein she dwells,  
 Its fabric's built all of hodmandod shells;  
 The hangings of a Rainbow made that's thin,  
 Shew wondrous fine, when one first enters in;  
 The chambers made of Amber that is clear,  
 Do give a fine sweet smell, if fire be near;  
 Her bed a cherry stone, is carved throughout,  
 And with a butterfly's wing hung about;  
 Her sheets are of the skin of Dove's eyes made  
 Where on a violet bud her pillow's laid.

So she could write when she was young. But her fairies, if they survived at all, grew up into hippopotami. Too generously her prayer was granted:

Give me the free and noble style,  
 Which seems uncurb'd, though it be wild.

She became capable of involutions, and contortions and conceits of which the following is among the shortest, but not the most terrific:

The human head may be likened to a town:  
 The mouth when full, begun  
 Is market day, when empty, market's done;  
 The city conduct, where the water flows,  
 Is with two spouts, the nostrils and the nose.

She similized, energetically, incongruously, eternally; the sea became a meadow, the sailors shepherds, the mast a maypole. The fly was the bird of summer, trees were senators, houses ships, and even the fairies, whom she loved better than any earthly thing, except the Duke, are changed into blunt atoms and sharp atoms, and take part in some of those horrible manœuvres in which she delighted to marshal the universe. Truly, 'my Lady

Sanspareille hath a strange spreading wit'. Worse still, without an atom of dramatic power, she turned to play-writing. It was a simple process. The unwieldy thoughts which turned and tumbled within her were christened Sir Golden Riches, Moll Meanbred, Sir Puppy Dogman, and the rest, and sent revolving in tedious debate upon the parts of the soul, or whether virtue is better than riches, round a wise and learned lady who answered their questions and corrected their fallacies at considerable length in tones which we seem to have heard before.

Sometimes, however, the Duchess walked abroad. She would issue out in her own proper person, dressed in a thousand gems and furbelows, to visit the houses of the neighbouring gentry. Her pen made instant report of these excursions. She recorded how Lady C. R. 'did beat her husband in a public assembly'; Sir F. O. 'I am sorry to hear hath undervalued himself so much below his birth and wealth as to marry his kitchen-maid'; 'Miss P. I. has become a sanctified soul, a spiritual sister, she has left curling her hair, black patches are become abominable to her, laced shoes and Galoshes are steps to pride—she asked me what posture I thought was the best to be used in prayer'. Her answer was probably unacceptable. 'I shall not rashly go there again', she says of one such 'gossip-making'. She was not, we may hazard, a welcome guest or an altogether hospitable hostess. She had a way of 'bragging of myself' which frightened visitors so that they left, nor was she sorry to see them go. Indeed, Welbeck was the best place for her, and her own company the most congenial, with the amiable Duke wandering in and out, with his plays and his speculations, always ready to answer a question or refute a slander. Perhaps it was this solitude that led her, chaste as she was in conduct, to use language which in time to come much perturbed Sir Egerton Brydges. She used, he complained, 'expressions and images of extraordinary coarseness as flowing from a female of high rank brought up in courts'. He forgot that this particular female had long ceased to frequent the Court; she consorted chiefly with fairies; and her friends were among the dead. Naturally, then, her language was coarse. Nevertheless, though her philosophies are futile, and her plays intolerable, and her verses mainly dull, the vast bulk of the Duchess is leavened by a vein of authentic fire. One cannot help following the lure

of her erratic and lovable personality as it meanders and twinkles through page after page. There is something noble and Quixotic and high-spirited, as well as crack-brained and bird-witted, about her. Her simplicity is so open; her intelligence so active; her sympathy with fairies and animals so true and tender. She has the freakishness of an elf, the irresponsibility of some non-human creature, its heartlessness, and its charm. And although 'they', those terrible critics who had sneered and jeered at her ever since, as a shy girl, she had not dared look her tormentors in the face at Court, continued to mock, few of her critics, after all, had the wit to trouble about the nature of the universe, or cared a straw for the sufferings of the hunted hare, or longed, as she did, to talk to some one 'of Shakespeare's fools'. Now, at any rate, the laugh is not all on their side.

But laugh they did. When the rumour spread that the crazy Duchess was coming up from Welbeck to pay her respects at Court, people crowded the streets to look at her, and the curiosity of Mr. Pepys twice brought him to wait in the Park to see her pass. But the pressure of the crowd about her coach was too great. He could only catch a glimpse of her in her silver coach with her footmen all in velvet, a velvet cap on her head, and her hair about her ears. He could only see for a moment between the white curtains the face of 'a very comely woman', and on she drove through the crowd of staring Cockneys, all pressing to catch a glimpse of that romantic lady, who stands, in the picture at Welbeck, with large melancholy eyes, and something fastidious and fantastic in her bearing, touching a table with the tips of long pointed fingers, in the calm assurance of immortal fame.

## Dorothy Osborne's *Letters*

IT must sometimes strike the casual reader of English literature that there is a bare season in it, sometimes like early spring in our countryside. The trees stand out; the hills are unmuffled in green; there is nothing to obscure the mass of the earth or the lines of the branches. But we miss the tremor and murmur of June, when the smallest wood seems full of movement, and one has only to stand still to hear the whispering and the pattering of nimble, inquisitive animals going about their affairs in the undergrowth. So in English literature we have to wait till the sixteenth century is over and the seventeenth well on its way before the bare landscape becomes full of stir and quiver and we can fill in the spaces between the great books with the voices of people talking.

Doubtless great changes in psychology were needed and great changes in material comfort—armchairs and carpets and good roads—before it was possible for human beings to watch each other curiously or to communicate their thoughts easily. And it may be that our early literature owes something of its magnificence to the fact that writing was an uncommon art, practised, rather for fame than for money, by those whose gifts compelled them. Perhaps the dissipation of our genius in biography, and journalism, and letter- and memoir-writing has weakened its strength in any one direction. However this may be, there is a bareness about an age that has neither letter-writers nor biographers. Lives and characters appear in stark outline. Donne, says Sir Edmund Gosse, is inscrutable; and that is largely because, though we know what Donne thought of Lady Bedford, we have not the slightest inkling what Lady Bedford thought of Donne. She had no friend to whom she described the effect of that strange visitor; nor, had she had a confidante, could she have explained for what reasons Donne seemed to her strange.

And the conditions that made it impossible for Boswell or Horace Walpole to be born in the sixteenth century were obviously likely to fall with far heavier force upon the other sex. Besides the material difficulty—Donne's small house at Mitcham with its thin walls and crying children typifies the discomfort in

which the Elizabethans lived—the woman was impeded also by her belief that writing was an act unbecoming her sex. A great lady here and there whose rank secured her the toleration and it may be the adulation of a servile circle, might write and print her writings. But the act was offensive to a woman of lower rank. ‘Sure the poore woman is a little distracted, she could never be soe ridiculous else as to venture writeing book’s and in verse too’, Dorothy Osborne exclaimed when the Duchess of Newcastle published one of her books. For her own part, she added, ‘If I could not sleep this fortnight I should not come to that’. And the comment is the more illuminating in that it was made by a woman of great literary gift. Had she been born in 1827, Dorothy Osborne would have written novels; had she been born in 1527, she would never have written at all. But she was born in 1627, and at that date though writing books was ridiculous for a woman there was nothing unseemly in writing a letter. And so by degrees the silence is broken; we begin to hear rustlings in the undergrowth; for the first time in English literature we hear men and women talking together over the fire.

But the art of letter-writing in its infancy was not the art that has since filled so many delightful volumes. Men and women were ceremoniously Sir and Madam; the language was still too rich and stiff to turn and twist quickly and freely upon half a sheet of notepaper. The art of letter-writing is often the art of essay-writing in disguise. But such as it was, it was an art that a woman could practise without unsexing herself. It was an art that could be carried on at odd moments, by a father’s sick-bed, among a thousand interruptions, without exciting comment, anonymously as it were, and often with the pretence that it served some useful purpose. Yet into these innumerable letters, lost now for the most part, went powers of observation and of wit that were later to take rather a different shape in *Evelina* and in *Pride and Prejudice*. They were only letters, yet some pride went to their making. Dorothy, without admitting it, took pains with her own writing and had views as to the nature of it: ‘. . . great Schollers are not the best writer’s (of Letters I mean, of books perhaps they are) . . . all letters mee thinks should be free and easy as one’s discourse’. She was in agreement with an old uncle of hers who threw his standish at his secretary’s head for saying ‘put pen to

paper' instead of simply 'wrote'. Yet there were limits, she reflected, to free-and-easiness: ' . . . many pritty things shuffled together' do better spoken than in a letter. And so we come by a form of literature, if Dorothy Osborne will let us call it so, which is distinct from any other, and much to be regretted now that it has gone from us, as it seems, for ever.

For Dorothy Osborne, as she filled her great sheets by her father's bed or by the chimney-corner, gave a record of life, gravely yet playfully, formally yet with intimacy, to a public of one, but to a fastidious public, as the novelist can never give it, or the historian either. Since it is her business to keep her lover informed of what passes in her home, she must sketch the solemn Sir Justinian Isham—Sir Solomon Justinian, she calls him—the pompous widower with four daughters and a great gloomy house in Northamptonshire who wished to marry her. 'Lord what would I give that I had a Lattin letter of his for you', she exclaimed, in which he describes her to an Oxford friend and specially commended her that she was 'capable of being company and conversation for him'; she must sketch her valetudinarian Cousin Molle waking one morning in fear of the dropsy and hurrying to the doctor at Cambridge; she must draw her own picture wandering in the garden at night and smelling the 'Jessomin', 'and yet I was not pleased' because Temple was not with her. Any gossip that comes her way is sent on to amuse her lover. Lady Sunderland, for instance, has condescended to marry plain Mr. Smith, who treats her like a princess, which Sir Justinian thinks a bad precedent for wives. But Lady Sunderland tells everyone she married him out of pity, and that, Dorothy comments, 'was the pittyfull'st sayeing that ever I heard'. Soon we have picked up enough about all her friends to snatch eagerly at any further addition to the picture which is forming in our mind's eye.

Indeed, our glimpse of the society of Bedfordshire in the seventeenth century is the more intriguing for its intermittency. In they come and out they go—Sir Justinian and Lady Diana, Mr. Smith and his countess—and we never know when or whether we shall hear of them again. But with all this haphazardry, the *Letters*, like the letters of all born letter-writers, provide their own continuity. They make us feel that we have our seat in the depths of Dorothy's mind, at the heart of the pageant which unfolds

itself page by page as we read. For she possesses indisputably the gift which counts for more in letter-writing than wit or brilliance or traffic with great people. By being herself without effort or emphasis, she envelops all these odds and ends in the flow of her own personality. It was a character that was both attractive and a little obscure. Phrase by phrase we come closer into touch with it. Of the womanly virtues that befitted her age she shows little trace. She says nothing of sewing or baking. She was a little indolent by temperament. She browsed casually on vast French romances. She roams the commons, loitering to hear the milkmaids sing; she walks in the garden by the side of a small river, 'where I sitt downe and wish you were with mee'. She was apt to fall silent in company and dream over the fire till some talk of flying, perhaps, roused her, and she made her brother laugh by asking what they were saying about flying, for the thought had struck her, if she could fly she could be with Temple. Gravity, melancholy were in her blood. She looked, her mother used to say, as if all her friends were dead. She is oppressed by a sense of fortune and its tyranny and the vanity of things and the uselessness of effort. Her mother and sister were grave women too, the sister famed for her letters, but fonder of books than of company, the mother 'counted as wise a woman as most in England', but sardonic. 'I have lived to see that 'tis almost impossible to think People worse than they are and soe will you'—Dorothy could remember her mother saying that. To assuage her spleen, Dorothy herself had to visit the wells at Epsom and to drink water that steel had stood in.

With such a temperament her humour naturally took the form of irony rather than of wit. She loved to mock her lover and to pour a fine raillery over the pomps and ceremonies of existence. Pride of birth she laughed at. Pompous old men were fine subjects for her satire. A dull sermon moved her to laughter. She saw through parties: she saw through ceremonies; she saw through worldliness and display. But with all this clear-sightedness there was something that she did not see through. She dreaded with a shrinking that was scarcely sane the ridicule of the world. The meddling of aunts and the tyranny of brothers exasperated her. 'I would live in a hollow Tree', she said, 'to avoyde them.' A husband kissing his wife in public seemed to her as 'ill a sight as



one would wish to see'. Though she cared no more whether people praised her beauty or her wit than whether 'they think my name Eliz: or Dor: ', a word of gossip about her own behaviour would set her in a quiver. Thus when it came to proving before the eyes of the world that she loved a poor man and was prepared to marry him, she could not do it. 'I confess that I have an humor that will not suffer mee to Expose myself to People's Scorne', she wrote. She could be 'sattisfyed within as narrow a compasse as that of any person liveing of my rank', but ridicule was intolerable to her. She shrank from any extravagance that could draw the censure of the world upon her. It was a weakness for which Temple had sometimes to reprove her.

For Temple's character emerges more and more clearly as the letters go on—it is a proof of Dorothy's gift as a correspondent. A good letter-writer so takes the colour of the reader at the other end, that from reading the one we can imagine the other. As she argues, as she reasons, we hear Temple almost as clearly as we hear Dorothy herself. He was in many ways the opposite of her. He drew out her melancholy by rebutting it; he made her defend her dislike of marriage by opposing it. Of the two Temple was by far the more robust and positive. Yet there was perhaps something—a little hardness, a little conceit—that justified her brother's dislike of him. He called Temple the 'proudest imperious insulting ill-natured man that ever was'. But, in the eyes of Dorothy, Temple had qualities that none of her other suitors possessed. He was not a mere country gentleman, nor a pompous Justice of the Peace, nor a town gallant, making love to every woman he met, nor a travelled Monsieur; for had he been any one of these things, Dorothy, with her quick sense of the ridiculous, would have had none of him. To her he had some charm, some sympathy, that the others lacked; she could write to him whatever came into her head; she was at her best with him; she loved him; she respected him. Yet suddenly she declared that marry him she would not. She turned violently against marriage indeed, and cited failure after failure. If people knew each other before marriage, she thought, there would be an end of it. Passion was the most brutish and tyrannical of all our senses. Passion had made Lady Anne Blount the 'talk of all the footmen and Boy's in the street'. Passion had been the undoing of the lovely

Lady Izabella—what use was her beauty now married to ‘that beast with all his estate’? Torn asunder by her brother’s anger, by Temple’s jealousy, and by her own dread of ridicule, she wished for nothing but to be left to find ‘an early and a quiet grave’. That Temple overcame her scruples and overrode her brother’s opposition is much to the credit of his character. Yet it is an act that we can hardly help deploring. Married to Temple, she wrote to him no longer. The letters almost immediately cease. The whole world that Dorothy had brought into existence is extinguished. It is then that we realize how round and populous and stirring that world has become. Under the warmth of her affection for Temple the stiffness had gone out of her pen. Writing half-asleep by her father’s side, snatching the back of an old letter to write upon, she had come to write easily though always with the dignity proper to that age, of the Lady Dianas, and the Ishams, of the aunts and the uncles—how they come, how they go; what they say; whether she finds them dull, laughable, charming, or much as usual. More than that, she has suggested, writing her mind out to Temple, the deeper relationships, the more private moods, that gave her life its conflict and its consolation—her brother’s tyranny; her own moodiness and melancholy; the sweetness of walking in the garden at night; of sitting lost in thought by the river; of longing for a letter and finding one. All this is around us; we are deep in this world, seizing its hints and suggestions when, in the moment, the scene is blotted out. She married, and her husband was a rising diplomat. She had to follow his fortunes in Brussels, at The Hague, wherever they called him. Seven children were born and seven children died ‘almost all in their cradle’. Innumerable duties and responsibilities fell to the lot of the girl who had made fun of pomp and ceremony, who loved privacy and had wished to live secluded out of the world and ‘grow old together in our little cottage’. Now she was mistress of her husband’s house at The Hague with its splendid buffet of plate. She was his confidante in the many troubles of his difficult career. She stayed behind in London to negotiate if possible the payment of his arrears of salary. When her yacht was fired on, she behaved, the King said, with greater courage than the captain himself. She was everything that the wife of an ambassador should be: she was every-

thing, too, that the wife of a man retired from the public service should be. And troubles came upon them—a daughter died; a son, inheriting perhaps his mother's melancholy, filled his boots with stones and leapt into the Thames. So the years passed; very full, very active, very troubled. But Dorothy maintained her silence.

At last, however, a strange young man came to Moor Park as secretary to her husband. He was difficult, ill-mannered, and quick to take offence. But it is through Swift's eyes that we see Dorothy once more in the last years of her life. 'Mild Dorothea, peaceful, wise, and great', Swift called her; but the light falls upon a ghost. We do not know that silent lady. We cannot connect her after all these years with the girl who poured her heart out to her lover. 'Peaceful, wise, and great'—she was none of those things when we last met her, and much though we honour the admirable ambassadress who made her husband's career her own, there are moments when we would exchange all the benefits of the Triple Alliance and all the glories of the Treaty of Nymegen for the letters that Dorothy did not write.

## Madame de Sévigné

THIS great lady, this robust and fertile letter-writer, who in our age would probably have been one of the great novelists, takes up presumably as much space in the consciousness of living readers as any figure of her vanished age. But it is more difficult to fix that figure within an outline than to sum up many of her contemporaries. That is partly because she created her being, not in plays or poems, but in letters—touch by touch, with repetitions, amassing daily trifles, writing down what came into her head as if she were talking. Thus the fourteen volumes of her letters enclose a vast open space, like one of her own great woods; the rides are criss-crossed with the intricate shadows of branches, figures roam down the glades, pass from sun to shadow, are lost to sight, appear again, but never sit down in fixed attitudes to compose a group.

Thus we live in her presence, and often fall, as with living people, into unconsciousness. She goes on talking, we half-listen. And then something she says rouses us. We add it to her character, so that the character grows and changes, and she seems like a living person, inexhaustible.

This of course is one of the qualities that all letter-writers possess, and she, because of her unconscious naturalness, her flow and abundance, possesses it far more than the brilliant Walpole, for example, or the reserved and self-conscious Gray. Perhaps in the long run we know her more instinctively, more profoundly, than we know them. We sink deeper down into her, and know by instinct rather than by reason how she will feel; this she will be amused by; that will take her fancy; now she will plunge into melancholy. Her range is larger than theirs; there is more scope and more diversity. Everything seems to yield its juice—its fun, its enjoyment; or to feed her meditations. She has a robust appetite; nothing shocks her; she gets nourishment from whatever is set before her. She is an intellectual, quick to enjoy the wit of La Rochefoucauld, to relish the fine discrimination of Madame de La Fayette. She has a natural dwelling-place in books, so that Josephus or Pascal or the absurd long romances of the time are

not read by her so much as embedded in her mind. Their verses, their stories rise to her lips along with her own thoughts. But there is a sensibility in her which intensifies this great appetite for many things. It is of course shown at its most extreme, its most irrational, in her love for her daughter. She loves her as an elderly man loves a young mistress who tortures him. It was a passion that was twisted and morbid; it caused her many humiliations; sometimes it made her ashamed of herself. For, from the daughter's point of view it was exhausting, was embarrassing to be the object of such intense emotion; and she could not always respond. She feared that her mother was making her ridiculous in the eyes of her friends. Also she felt that she was not like that. She was different; colder, more fastidious, less robust. Her mother was ignoring the real daughter in this flood of adoration for a daughter who did not exist. She was forced to curb her; to assert her own identity. It was inevitable that Madame de Sévigné, with her exacerbated sensibility, should feel hurt.

Sometimes, therefore, Madame de Sévigné weeps. The daughter does not love her. That is a thought so bitter, and a fear so perpetual and so profound, that life loses its savour; she has recourse to sages, to poets to console her; and reflects with sadness upon the vanity of life; and how death will come. Then, too, she is agitated beyond what is right or reasonable, because a letter has not reached her. Then she knows that she has been absurd; and realizes that she is boring her friends with this obsession. What is worse, she has bored her daughter. And then when the bitter drop has fallen, up bubbles quicker and quicker the ebullition of that robust vitality, of that irrepressible quick enjoyment, that natural relish for life, as if she instinctively repaired her failure by fluttering all her feathers; by making every facet glitter. She shakes herself out of her glooms; makes fun of 'les D'Hacquevilles'; collects a handful of gossip; the latest news of the King and Madame de Maintenon; how Charles has fallen in love; how the ridiculous Mademoiselle de Plessis has been foolish again; when she wanted a handkerchief to spit into, the silly woman tweaked her nose; or describes how she has been amusing herself by amazing the simple little girl who lives at the end of the park—la petite personne—with stories of kings and countries, of all that great world that she who has lived in the

thick of it knows so well. At last, comforted, assured for the time being at least of her daughter's love, she lets herself relax; and throwing off all disguises, tells her daughter how nothing in the world pleases her so well as solitude. She is happiest alone in the country. She loves rambling alone in her woods. She loves going out by herself at night. She loves hiding from callers. She loves walking among her trees and musing. She loves the gardener's chatter; she loves planting. She loves the gipsy girl who dances, as her own daughter used to dance, but not of course so exquisitely.

It is natural to use the present tense, because we live in her presence. We are very little conscious of a disturbing medium between us—that she is living, after all, by means of written words. But now and then with the sound of her voice in our ears and its rhythm rising and falling within us, we become aware, with some sudden phrase, about spring, about a country neighbour, something struck off in a flash, that we are, of course, being addressed by one of the great mistresses of the art of speech.

Then we listen for a time, consciously. How, we wonder, does she contrive to make us follow every word of the story of the cook who killed himself because the fish failed to come in time for the royal dinner party; or the scene of the haymaking; or the anecdote of the servant whom she dismissed in a sudden rage; how does she achieve this order, this perfection of composition? Did she practise her art? It seems not. Did she tear up and correct? There is no record of any painstaking effort. She says again and again that she writes her letters as she speaks. She begins one as she sends off another; there is the page on her desk and she fills it, in the intervals of all her other avocations. People are interrupting; servants are coming for orders. She entertains; she is at the beck and call of her friends. It seems then that she must have been so imbued with good sense, by the age she lived in, by the company she kept—La Rochefoucauld's wisdom, Madame de La Fayette's conversation, by hearing now a play by Racine, by reading Montaigne, Rabelais, or Pascal; perhaps by sermons, perhaps by some of those songs that Coulanges was always singing—she must have imbibed so much that was sane and wholesome unconsciously that, when she took up her pen, it followed unconsciously the laws she had learnt by heart. Marie de

Rabutin it seems was born into a group where the elements were so richly and happily mixed that it drew out her virtue instead of opposing it. She was helped, not thwarted. Nothing baffled or contracted or withered her. What opposition she encountered was only enough to confirm her judgment. For she was highly conscious of folly, of vice, of pretension. She was born a critic, and a critic whose judgments were inborn, unhesitating. She is always referring her impressions to a standard—hence the incisiveness, the depth, and the comedy that make those spontaneous statements so illuminating. There is nothing naive about her. She is by no means a simple spectator. Maxims fall from her pen. She sums up; she judges. But it is done effortlessly. She has inherited the standard and accepts it without effort. She is heir to a tradition, which stands guardian and gives proportion. The gaiety, the colour, the chatter, the many movements of the figures in the foreground have a background. At Les Rochers there is always Paris and the court; at Paris there is Les Rochers, with its solitude, its trees, its peasants. And behind them all again there is virtue, faith, death itself. But this background, while it gives its scale to the moment, is so well established that she is secure. She is free, thus anchored, to explore; to enjoy; to plunge this way and that; to enter wholeheartedly into the myriad humours, pleasures, oddities, and savours of her well-nourished, prosperous, delightful present moment.

So she passes with free and stately step from Paris to Brittany; from Brittany in her coach and six all across France. She stays with friends on the road; she is attended by a cheerful company of familiars. Wherever she alights she attracts at once the love of some boy or girl; or the exacting admiration of a man of the world like her disagreeable cousin Bussy Rabutin, who cannot rest under her disapproval, but must be assured of her good opinion in spite of all his treachery. The famous and the brilliant also wish to have her company, for she is part of their world; and can take her share in their sophisticated conversations. There is something wise and large and sane about her which draws the confidences of her own son. Feckless and impulsive, the prey of his own weak and charming nature as he is, Charles nurses her with the utmost patience through her rheumatic fever. She laughs at his foibles; knows his failings. She is tolerant and outspoken;

nothing need be hidden from her; she knows all that there is to be known of man and his passions.

So she takes her way through the world, and sends her letters, radiant and glowing with all this various traffic from one end of France to the other, twice weekly. As the fourteen volumes so spaciouly unfold their story of twenty years it seems that this world is large enough to enclose everything. Here is the garden that Europe has been digging for many centuries; into which so many generations have poured their blood; here it is at last fertilized, bearing flowers. And the flowers are not those rare and solitary blossoms—great men, with their poems, and their conquests. The flowers in this garden are a whole society of full-grown men and women from whom want and struggle have been removed; growing together in harmony, each contributing something that the other lacks. By way of proving it the letters of Madame de Sévigné are often shared by other pens; now her son takes up the pen; the Abbé adds his paragraph; even the simple girl—*la petite personne*—is not afraid to pipe up on the same page. The month of May, 1678, at Les Rochers in Brittany, thus echoes with different voices. There are the birds singing; Pilois is planting; Madame de Sévigné roams the woods alone; her daughter is entertaining politicians in Provence; not very far away Monsieur de Rochefoucauld is engaged in telling the truth with Madame de La Fayette to prune his words; Racine is finishing the play which soon they will all be hearing together; and discussing afterwards with the King and that lady whom in the private language of their set they call *Quanto*. The voices mingle; they are all talking together in the garden in 1678. But what was happening outside?



## Swift's *Journal to Stella*

IN any highly civilized society disguise plays so large a part, politeness is so essential, that to throw off the ceremonies and conventions and talk a 'little language' for one or two to understand, is as much a necessity as a breath of air in a hot room. The reserved, the powerful, the admired, have the most need of such a refuge. Swift himself found it so. The proudest of men coming home from the company of great men who praised him, of lovely women who flattered him, from intrigue and politics, put all that aside, settled himself comfortably in bed, pursed his severe lips into baby language and prattled to his 'two monkees', his 'dear Sirrahs', his 'naughty rogues' on the other side of the Irish Channel.

Well, let me see you now again. My wax candle's almost out, but however I'll begin. Well then don't be so tedious, Mr. Presto; what can you say to MD's letter? Make haste, have done with your preambles—why, I say, I am glad you are so often abroad.

So long as Swift wrote to Stella in that strain, carelessly, illegibly, for 'methinks when I write plain, I do not know how, but we are not alone, all the world can see us. A bad scrawl is so snug . . .', Stella had no need to be jealous. It was true that she was wearing away the flower of her youth in Ireland with Rebecca Dingley, who wore hinged spectacles, consumed large quantities of Brazil tobacco, and stumbled over her petticoats as she walked. Further, the conditions in which the two ladies lived, for ever in Swift's company when he was at home, occupying his house when he was absent, gave rise to gossip; so that though Stella never saw him except in Mrs. Dingley's presence, she was one of those ambiguous women who live chiefly in the society of the other sex. But surely it was well worth while. The packets kept coming from England, each sheet written to the rim in Swift's crabbed little hand, which she imitated to perfection, full of nonsense words, and capital letters, and hints which no one but Stella could understand, and secrets which Stella was to keep, and little commissions which Stella was to execute. Tobacco

came for Dingley, and chocolate and silk aprons for Stella. Whatever people might say, surely it was well worth while.

Of this Presto, who was so different from that formidable character 't'other I', the world knew nothing. The world knew only that Swift was over in England again, soliciting the new Tory government on behalf of the Irish Church for those First Fruits which he had begged the Whigs in vain to restore. The business was soon accomplished; nothing indeed could exceed the cordiality and affection with which Harley and St. John greeted him; and now the world saw what even in those days of small societies and individual pre-eminence must have been a sight to startle and amaze—the 'mad parson', who had marched up and down the coffee-houses in silence and unknown a few years ago, admitted to the inmost councils of State; the penniless boy who was not allowed to sit down at table with Sir William Temple dining with the highest Ministers of the Crown, making dukes do his bidding, and so run after for his good offices that his servant's chief duty was to know how to keep people out. Addison himself forced his way up only by pretending that he was a gentleman come to pay a bill. For the time being Swift was omnipotent. Nobody could buy his services; everybody feared his pen. He went to Court, and 'am so proud I make all the lords come up to me'. The Queen wished to hear him preach; Harley and St. John added their entreaties; but he refused. When Mr. Secretary one night dared show his temper, Swift called upon him and warned him

never to appear cold to me, for I would not be treated like a schoolboy. . . . He took all right; said I had reason . . . would have had me dine with him at Mrs. Masham's brother, to make up matters; but I would not. I don't know, but I would not.

He scribbled all this down to Stella without exultation or vanity. That he should command and dictate, prove himself the peer of great men and make rank abase itself before him, called for no comment on his part or on hers. Had she not known him years ago at Moor Park and seen him lose his temper with Sir William Temple, and guessed his greatness and heard from his own lips what he planned and hoped? Did she not know better than anyone how strangely good and bad were blent in him and all his

foibles and eccentricities of temper? He scandalized the lords with whom he dined by his stinginess, picked the coals off his fire, saved halfpence on coaches; and yet by the help of these very economies he practised, she knew, the most considerate and secret of charities—he gave poor Patty Rolt ‘a pistole to help her a little forward against she goes to board in the country’; he took twenty guineas to young Harrison, the sick poet, in his garret. She alone knew how he could be coarse in his speech and yet delicate in his behaviour; how he could be cynical superficially and yet cherish a depth of feeling which she had never met with in any other human being. They knew each other in and out; the good and the bad, the deep and the trivial; so that without effort or concealment he could use those precious moments late at night or the first thing on waking to pour out upon her the whole story of his day, with its charities and meannesses, its affections and ambitions and despairs, as though he were thinking aloud.

With such proof of his affection, admitted to intimacy with this Presto whom no one else in the world knew, Stella had no cause to be jealous. It was perhaps the opposite that happened. As she read the crowded pages, she could see him and hear him and imagine so exactly the impression that he must be making on all these fine people that she fell more deeply in love with him than ever. Not only was he courted and flattered by the great; everybody seemed to call upon him when they were in trouble. There was ‘young Harrison’; he worried to find him ill and penniless; carried him off to Knightsbridge; took him a hundred pounds only to find that he was dead an hour before. ‘Think what grief this is to me! . . . I could not dine with Lord Treasurer, nor anywhere else; but got a bit of meat toward evening.’ She could imagine the strange scene, that November morning, when the Duke of Hamilton was killed in Hyde Park, and Swift went at once to the Duchess and sat with her for two hours and heard her rage and storm and rail; and took her affairs, too, on his shoulders as if it were his natural office, and none could dispute his place in the house of mourning. ‘She has moved my very soul’, he said. When young Lady Ashburnham died he burst out, ‘I hate life when I think it exposed to such accidents; and to see so many thousand wretches burdening the earth, while such as her

die, makes me think God did never intend life for a blessing'. And then, with that instinct to rend and tear his own emotions which made him angry in the midst of his pity, he would round upon the mourners, even the mother and sister of the dead woman, and part them as they cried together and complain how 'people will pretend to grieve more than they really do, and that takes off from their true grief'.

All this was poured forth freely to Stella; the gloom and the anger, the kindness and the coarseness and the genial love of little ordinary human things. To her he showed himself fatherly and brotherly; he laughed at her spelling; he scolded her about her health; he directed her business affairs. He gossiped and chatted with her. They had a fund of memories in common. They had spent many happy hours together. 'Do not you remember I used to come into your chamber and turn Stella out of her chair, and rake up the fire in a cold morning and cry *uth, uth, uth!*' She was often in his mind; he wondered if she was out walking when he was; when Prior abused one of his puns he remembered Stella's puns and how vile they were; he compared his life in London with hers in Ireland and wondered when they would be together again. And if this was the influence of Stella upon Swift in town among all the wits, the influence of Swift upon Stella marooned in an Irish village alone with Dingley was far greater. He had taught her all the little learning she had when she was a child and he a young man years ago at Moor Park. His influence was everywhere—upon her mind, upon her affections, upon the books she read and the hand she wrote, upon the friends she made and the suitors she rejected. Indeed, he was half responsible for her being.

But the woman he had chosen was no insipid slave. She had a character of her own. She was capable of thinking for herself. She was aloof, a severe critic for all her grace and sympathy, a little formidable perhaps with her love of plain speaking and her fiery temper and her fearlessness in saying what she thought. But with all her gifts she was little known. Her slender means and feeble health and dubious social standing made her way of life very modest. The society which gathered round her came for the simple pleasure of talking to a woman who listened and understood and said very little herself, but in the most agreeable

of voices and generally 'the best thing that was said in the company'. For the rest she was not learned. Her health had prevented her from serious study, and though she had run over a great variety of subjects and had a fine severe taste in letters, what she did read did not stick in her mind. She had been extravagant as a girl, and flung her money about until her good sense took control of her, and now she lived with the utmost frugality. 'Five nothings on five plates of delf' made her supper. Attractive, if not beautiful, with her fine dark eyes and her raven black hair, she dressed very plainly, and thus contrived to lay by enough to help the poor and to bestow upon her friends (it was an extravagance that she could not resist) 'the most agreeable presents in the world'. Swift never knew her equal in that art, 'although it be an affair of as delicate a nature as most in the course of life'. She had in addition that sincerity which Swift called 'honour', and in spite of the weakness of her body 'the personal courage of a hero'. Once when a robber came to her window, she had shot him through the body with her own hand. Such, then, was the influence which worked on Swift as he wrote; such the presence that mingled with the thought of his fruit trees and the willows and the trout stream at Laracor when he saw the trees budding in St. James's Park and heard the politicians wrangle at Westminster. Unknown to all of them, he had his retreat; and if the Ministers again played him false, and once more, after making his friends' fortunes, he went empty-handed away, then after all he could retire to Ireland and to Stella and have 'no shuddering at all' at the thought.

But Stella was the last woman in the world to press her claims. None knew better than she that Swift loved power and the company of men: that though he had his moods of tenderness and his fierce spasms of disgust at society, still for the most part he infinitely preferred the dust and bustle of London to all the trout streams and cherry trees in the world. Above all, he hated interference. If anyone laid a finger upon his liberty or hinted the least threat to his independence, were they men or women, queens or kitchen-maids, he turned upon them with a ferocity which made a savage of him on the spot. Harley once dared to offer him a bank-note; Miss Waring dared hint that the obstacles to their marriage were now removed. Both were chastised, the

woman brutally. But Stella knew better than to invite such treatment. Stella had learnt patience; Stella had learnt discretion. Even in a matter like this of staying in London or coming back to Ireland she allowed him every latitude. She asked nothing for herself and therefore got more than she asked. Swift was half-annoyed:

... your generosity makes me mad; I know you repine inwardly at Presto's absence; you think he has broken his word, of coming in three months, and that this is always his trick: and now Stella says, she does not see possibly how I can come away in haste, and that MD is satisfied, etc. An't you a rogue to overpower me thus?

But it was thus that she kept him. Again and again he burst into language of intense affection:

Farewell dear Sirrahs, dearest lives: there is peace and quiet with MD, and nowhere else. . . . Farewell again, dearest rogues: I am never happy, but when I write or think of MD. . . . You are as welcome as my blood to every farthing I have in the world: and all that grieves me is, I am not richer, for MD's sake.

One thing alone dashed the pleasure that such words gave her. It was always in the plural that he spoke of her; it was always 'dearest Sirrahs, dearest lives'; MD stood for Stella and Mrs. Dingley together. Swift and Stella were never alone. Grant that this was for form's sake merely, grant that the presence of Mrs. Dingley, busy with her keys and her lap-dog and never listening to a word that was said to her, was a form too. But why should such forms be necessary? Why impose a strain that wasted her health and half-spoilt her pleasure and kept 'perfect friends' who were happy only in each other's company apart? Why indeed? There was a reason; a secret that Stella knew; a secret that Stella did not impart. Divided they had to be. Since, then, no bond bound them, since she was afraid to lay the least claim upon her friend, all the more jealously must she have searched into his words and analysed his conduct to ascertain the temper of his mood and acquaint herself instantly with the least change in it. So long as he told her frankly of his 'favourites' and showed himself the bluff tyrant who required every woman to make advances to him, who lectured fine ladies and let them tease him, all was well. There was nothing in that to rouse her sus-

picious. Lady Berkeley might steal his hat; the Duchess of Hamilton might lay bare her agony; and Stella, who was kind to her sex, laughed with the one and grieved with the other.

But were there traces in the *Journal* of a different sort of influence—something far more dangerous because more equal and more intimate? Suppose that there were some woman of Swift's own station, a girl, like the girl that Stella herself had been when Swift first knew her, dissatisfied with the ordinary way of life, eager, as Stella put it, to know right from wrong, gifted, witty, and untaught—she indeed, if she existed, might be a rival to be feared. But was there such a rival? If so, it was plain that there would be no mention of her in the *Journal*. Instead, there would be hesitations, excuses, an occasional uneasiness and embarrassment when, in the midst of writing freely and fully, Swift was brought to a stop by something that he could not say. Indeed, he had only been a month or two in England when some such silence roused Stella's suspicions. Who was it, she asked, that boarded near him, that he dined with now and then? 'I know no such person,' Swift replied; 'I do not dine with boarders. What the pox! You know whom I have dined with every day since I left you, better than I do. What do you mean, Sirrah?' But he knew what she meant: she meant Mrs. Vanhomrigh, the widow who lived near him; she meant her daughter Esther. 'The Vans' kept coming again and again after that in the *Journal*. Swift was too proud to conceal the fact that he saw them, but he sought nine times out of ten to excuse it. When he was in Suffolk Street the Vanhomrighs were in St. James's Street and thus saved him a walk. When he was in Chelsea they were in London, and it was convenient to keep his best gown and periwig there. Sometimes the heat kept him there and sometimes the rain; now they were playing cards, and young Lady Ashburnham reminded him so much of Stella that he stayed on to help her. Sometimes he stayed out of listlessness; again he stayed because he was very busy and they were simple people who did not stand on ceremony. At the same time Stella had only to hint that these Vanhomrighs were people of no consequence for him to retort, 'Why, they keep as good female company as I do male. . . . I saw two lady Bettys there this afternoon.' In short, to tell the whole truth, to write whatever came into his head in the old free way, was no longer easy.

Indeed, the whole situation was full of difficulty. No man detested falsehood more than Swift or loved truth more wholeheartedly. Yet here he was compelled to hedge, to hide, and to prevaricate. Again, it had become essential to him to have some 'sluttry' or private chamber where he could relax and unbend and be Presto and not 't'other I'. Stella satisfied this need as no one else could. But then Stella was in Ireland; Vanessa was on the spot. She was younger and fresher; she too had her charms. She too could be taught and improved and scolded into maturity as Stella had been. Obviously Swift's influence upon her was all to the good. And so with Stella in Ireland and Vanessa in London, why should it not be possible to enjoy what each could give him, confer benefits on both and do no serious harm to either? It seemed possible; at any rate he allowed himself to make the experiment. Stella, after all, had contrived for many years to make shift with her portion; Stella had never complained of her lot.

But Vanessa was not Stella. She was younger, more vehement, less disciplined, less wise. She had no Mrs. Dingley to restrain her. She had no memories of the past to solace her. She had no journals coming day by day to comfort her. She loved Swift and she knew no reason why she should not say so. Had he not himself taught her 'to act what was right, and not to mind what the world said'? Thus when some obstacle impeded her, when some mysterious secret came between them, she had the unwisdom to question him. 'Pray what can be wrong in seeing and advising an unhappy young woman? I can't imagine.' 'You have taught me to distinguish,' she burst out, 'and then you leave me miserable.' Finally in her anguish and her bewilderment she had the temerity to force herself upon Stella. She wrote and demanded to be told the truth—what was Stella's connexion with Swift? But it was Swift himself who enlightened her. And when the full force of those bright blue eyes blazed upon her, when he flung her letter on the table and glared at her and said nothing and rode off, her life was ended. It was no figure of speech when she said that 'his killing, killing words' were worse than the rack to her; when she cried out that there was 'something in your look so awful that it strikes me dumb'. Within a few weeks of that interview she was dead; she had vanished, to become one of those



uneasy ghosts who haunted the troubled background of Stella's life, peopling its solitude with fears.

Stella was left to enjoy her intimacy alone. She lived on to practise those sad arts by which she kept her friend at her side until, worn out with the strain and the concealment, with Mrs. Dingley and her lap-dogs, with the perpetual fears and frustrations, she too died. As they buried her, Swift sat in a back room away from the lights in the churchyard and wrote an account of the character of 'the truest, most virtuous, and valuable friend, that I, or perhaps any other person, was ever blessed with'. Years passed; insanity overcame him; he exploded in violent outbursts of mad rage. Then by degrees he fell silent. Once they caught him murmuring. 'I am what I am', they heard him say.

## Lord Chesterfield's Letters to His Son

WHEN Lord Mahon edited the letters of Lord Chesterfield he thought it necessary to warn the intending reader that they are 'by no means fitted for early or indiscriminate perusal'. Only 'those people whose understandings are fixed and whose principles are matured' can, so his Lordship said, read them with impunity. But that was in 1845. And 1845 looks a little distant now. It seems to us now the age of enormous houses without any bathrooms. Men smoke in the kitchen after the cook has gone to bed. Albums lie upon drawing-room tables. The curtains are very thick and the women are very pure. But the eighteenth century also has undergone a change. To us in 1930 it looks less strange, less remote than those early Victorian years. Its civilization seems more rational and more complete than the civilization of Lord Mahon and his contemporaries. Then at any rate a small group of highly educated people lived up to their ideals. If the world was smaller it was also more compact; it knew its own mind; it had its own standards. Its poetry is affected by the same security. When we read the *Rape of the Lock* we seem to find ourselves in an age so settled and so circumscribed that masterpieces were possible. Then, we say to ourselves, a poet could address himself whole-heartedly to his task and keep his mind upon it, so that the little boxes on a lady's dressing-table are fixed among the solid possessions of our imaginations. A game at cards or a summer's boating party upon the Thames has power to suggest the same beauty and the same sense of things vanishing that we receive from poems aimed directly at our deepest emotions. And just as the poet could spend all his powers upon a pair of scissors and a lock of hair, so too, secure in his world and its values, the aristocrat could lay down precise laws for the education of his son. In that world also there was a certainty, a security that we are now without. What with one thing and another times have changed. We can now read Lord Chesterfield's letters without blushing, or, if we do blush, we blush in the twentieth century at passages that caused Lord Mahon no discomfort whatever.

When the letters begin, Philip Stanhope, Lord Chesterfield's natural son by a Dutch governess, was a little boy of seven. And if we are to make any complaint against the father's moral teaching, it is that the standard is too high for such tender years. 'Let us return to oratory, or the art of speaking well; which should never be entirely out of our thoughts', he writes to the boy of seven. 'A man can make no figure without it in Parliament, or the Church, or in the law', he continues, as if the little boy were already considering his career. It seems, indeed, that the father's fault, if fault it be, is one common to distinguished men who have not themselves succeeded as they should have done and are determined to give their children—and Philip was an only child—the chances that they have lacked. Indeed, as the letters go on one may suppose that Lord Chesterfield wrote as much to amuse himself by turning over the stories of his experience, his reading, his knowledge of the world, as to instruct his son. The letters show an eagerness, an animation, which prove that to write to Philip was not a task, but a delight. Tired, perhaps, with the duties of office and disillusioned with its disappointments, he takes up his pen and, in the relief of free communication at last, forgets that his correspondent is, after all, only a schoolboy who cannot understand half the things that his father says to him. But, even so, there is nothing to repel us in Lord Chesterfield's preliminary sketch of the unknown world. He is all on the side of moderation, toleration, ratiocination. Never abuse whole bodies of people, he counsels; frequent all churches, laugh at none; inform yourself about all things. Devote your mornings to study, your evenings to good society. Dress as the best people dress, behave as they behave, never be eccentric, egotistical, or absent-minded. Observe the laws of proportion, and live every moment to the full.

So, step by step, he builds up the figure of the perfect man—the man that Philip may become, he is persuaded, if he will only—and here Lord Chesterfield lets fall the words which are to colour his teaching through and through—cultivate the Graces. These ladies are, at first, kept discreetly in the background. It is well that the boy should be indulged in fine sentiments about women and poets to begin with. Lord Chesterfield adjures him to respect them both. 'For my own part, I used to think myself

in company as much above me when I was with Mr. Addison and Mr. Pope, as if I had been with all the Princes in Europe', he writes. But as time goes on the Virtues are more and more taken for granted. They can be left to take care of themselves. But the Graces assume tremendous proportions. The Graces dominate the life of man in this world. Their service cannot for an instant be neglected. And the service is certainly exacting. For consider what it implies, this art of pleasing. To begin with, one must know how to come into a room and then how to go out again. As human arms and legs are notoriously perverse, this by itself is a matter needing considerable dexterity. Then one must be dressed so that one's clothes seem perfectly fashionable without being new or striking; one's teeth must be perfect; one's wig beyond reproach; one's finger-nails cut in the segment of a circle; one must be able to carve, able to dance, and, what is almost as great an art, able to sit gracefully in a chair. These things are the alphabet of the art of pleasing. We now come to speech. It is necessary to speak at least three languages to perfection. But before we open our lips we must take a further precaution—we must be on our guard never to laugh. Lord Chesterfield himself never laughed. He always smiled. When at length the young man is pronounced capable of speech he must avoid all proverbs and vulgar expressions; he must enunciate clearly and use perfect grammar; he must not argue; he must not tell stories; he must not talk about himself. Then, at last, the young man may begin to practise the finest of the arts of pleasing—the art of flattery. For every man and every woman has some prevailing vanity. Watch, wait, pry, seek out their weakness, 'and you will then know what to bait your hook with to catch them'. For that is the secret of success in the world.

It is at this point, such is the idiosyncrasy of our age, that we begin to feel uneasy. Lord Chesterfield's views upon success are far more questionable than his views upon love. For what is to be the prize of this endless effort and self-abnegation? What do we gain when we have learnt to come into rooms and to go out again; to pry into people's secrets; to hold our tongues and to flatter; to forsake the society of low-born people which corrupts and the society of clever people which perverts? What is the prize which is to reward us? It is simply that we shall rise in the world.

Press for a further definition, and it amounts perhaps to this: one will be popular with the best people. But if we are so exacting as to demand who the best people are we become involved in a labyrinth from which there is no returning. Nothing exists in itself. What is good society? It is the society that the best people believe to be good. What is wit? It is what the best people think to be witty. All value depends upon somebody else's opinion. For it is the essence of this philosophy that things have no independent existence, but live only in the eyes of other people. It is a looking-glass world, this, to which we climb so slowly; and its prizes are all reflections. That may account for our baffled feeling as we shuffle, and shuffle vainly, among these urbane pages for something hard to lay our hands upon. Hardness is the last thing we shall find. But, granted the deficiency, how much that is ignored by sterner moralists is here seized upon, and who shall deny, at least while Lord Chesterfield's enchantment is upon him, that these imponderable qualities have their value and these shining Graces have their radiance? Consider for a moment what the Graces have done for their devoted servant, the Earl.

Here is a disillusioned politician, who is prematurely aged, who has lost his office, who is losing his teeth, who, worst fate of all, is growing deafer day by day. Yet he never allows a groan to escape him. He is never dull; he is never boring; he is never slovenly. His mind is as well groomed as his body. Never for a second does he 'welter in an easy-chair'. Private though these letters are, and apparently spontaneous, they play with such ease in and about the single subject which absorbs them that it never becomes tedious or, what is still more remarkable, never becomes ridiculous. It may be that the art of pleasing has some connexion with the art of writing. To be polite, considerate, controlled, to sink one's egotism, to conceal rather than to obtrude one's personality, may profit the writer even as they profit the man of fashion.

Certainly there is much to be said in favour of the training, however we define it, which helped Lord Chesterfield to write his Characters. The little papers have the precision and formality of some old-fashioned minuet. Yet the symmetry is so natural to the artist that he can break it where he likes; it never becomes pinched and formal, as it would in the hands of an imitator. He

can be sly; he can be witty; he can be sententious, but never for an instant does he lose his sense of time, and when the tune is over he calls a halt. 'Some succeeded, and others burst' he says of George the First's mistresses: the King liked them fat. Again, 'He was fixed in the house of lords, that hospital of incurables.' He smiles: he does not laugh. Here the eighteenth century, of course, came to his help. Lord Chesterfield, though he was polite to everything, even to the stars and Bishop Berkeley's philosophy, firmly refused, as became a son of his age, to dally with infinity or to suppose that things are not quite as solid as they seem. The world was good enough and the world was big enough as it was. This prosaic temper, while it keeps him within the bounds of impeccable common sense, limits his outlook. No single phrase of his reverberates or penetrates as so many of La Bruyère's do. But he would have been the first to deprecate any comparison with that great writer; besides, to write as La Bruyère wrote, one must perhaps believe in something, and then how difficult to observe the Graces! One might perhaps laugh; one might perhaps cry. Both are equally deplorable.

But while we amuse ourselves with this brilliant nobleman and his views on life we are aware, and the letters owe much of their fascination to this consciousness, of a dumb yet substantial figure on the farther side of the page. Philip Stanhope is always there. It is true that he says nothing, but we feel his presence in Dresden, in Berlin, in Paris, opening the letters and poring over them and looking dolefully at the thick packets which have been accumulating year after year since he was a child of seven. He had grown into a rather serious, rather stout, rather short young man. He had a taste for foreign politics. A little serious reading was rather to his liking. And by every post the letters came—urbane, polished, brilliant, imploring and commanding him to learn to dance, to learn to carve, to consider the management of his legs, and to seduce a lady of fashion. He did his best. He worked very hard in the school of the Graces, but their service was too exacting. He sat down half-way up the steep stairs which lead to the glittering hall with all the mirrors. He could not do it. He failed in the House of Commons; he subsided into some small post in Ratisbon; he died untimely. He left it to his widow to break the news which he had lacked the heart or the courage to tell his

father—that he had been married all these years to a lady of low birth, who had borne him children.

The Earl took the blow like a gentleman. His letter to his daughter-in-law is a model of urbanity. He began the education of his grandsons. But he seems to have become a little indifferent to what happened to himself after that. He did not care greatly if he lived or died. But still to the very end he cared for the Graces. His last words were a tribute of respect to those goddesses. Someone came into the room when he was dying; he roused himself: 'Give Dayrolles a chair,' he said, and said no more.

## Sterne<sup>1</sup>

IT is the custom to draw a distinction between a man and his works and to add that, although the world has a claim to read every line of his writing, it must not ask questions about the author. The distinction has arisen, we may believe, because the art of biography has fallen very low, and people of good taste infer that a 'life' will merely gratify a base curiosity, or will set up a respectable figure of sawdust. It is therefore a wise precaution to limit one's study of a writer to the study of his works; but, like other precautions, it implies some loss. We sacrifice an aesthetic pleasure, possibly of first-rate value—a life of Johnson, for example—and we raise boundaries where there should be none. A writer is a writer from his cradle; in his dealings with the world, in his affections, in his attitude to the thousand small things that happen between dawn and sunset, he shows the same point of view as that which he elaborates afterwards with a pen in his hand. It is more fragmentary and incoherent, but it is also more intense. To this, which one may call the aesthetic interest of his character, there are added the various interests of circumstance—where and how he was born and bred and educated—which all men share, but which are of greater interest as they affect a more original talent. The weakness of modern biographers seems to lie not in their failure to realize that both elements are present in the life of a writer, but in their determination to separate them. It is easier for them to draw distinctions than to see things whole. There is a common formula, in which, having delivered judgment upon his work, they state that 'a few facts about his life' may not be inappropriate, or, writing from the opposite standpoint, proclaim that their concern is 'with the man and not with his works'. A distinction is made in this way which we do not find in the original, and from this reason mainly arises the common complaint against a biography, that it is 'not like'. We have lives that are all ceremony and work; and lives that are all chatter and scandal. A certain stigma is attached to the biography which deals mainly with a man's personal history, and

<sup>1</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, August 12th, 1909



the writer who sees him most clearly in that light is driven to represent him under the cover of fiction. The fascination of novel-writing lies in its freedom; the dull parts can be skipped, and the excitements intensified; but above all the character can be placed artistically, set, that is, in fitting surroundings and composed so as to give whatever impression you choose. The traditional form is far less definite in the case of novels than in the case of biographies, because (one may guess) the sensibilities of conventional people have much less say in the matter. One of the objects of biography is to make men appear as they ought to be, for they are husbands and brothers; but no one takes a character in fiction quite seriously. It is there, indeed, that the main disadvantage of novel-writing lies, for the aesthetic effect of truth is only to be equalled by the imagination of genius. There are a dozen incidents in a second-rate novel which might have happened in a dozen different ways, and the least consciousness of indecision blurs the effect; but the bare statement of facts has an indisputable power, if we have reason to think them true. The knowledge that they are true, it may be, leads us to connect them with other ideas; but if we know that they never happened at all, and doubt that they could have happened in this way, they suggest nothing distinct, because they are not distinct themselves. Again, a real life is wonderfully prolific; it passes through such strange places and draws along with it a train of adventures that no novelist can better them, if only he can deal with them as with his own inventions.

Certainly, no novelist could wish for finer material than the life of Sterne affords him. His story was 'like a romance' and his genius was of the rarest. There is a trace of the usual apology in Professor Cross's preface,<sup>1</sup> to the effect that he is not going to pass judgment on the writings, but merely to give the facts of the life. In his opinion such facts would be dull enough, if it did not 'turn out', as he remarks, that the writings are in part autobiographical, so that one may consider his life without irrelevance. But Professor Cross has surely underrated the value of his material, or the use he has made of it, for the book makes excellent reading from start to finish, and persuades us that we know Sterne better than we did before.

<sup>1</sup> *The Life and Times of Laurence Sterne*, by Wilbur L. Cross

There are certain scenes upon which, were one writing a novel, one would like to dwell. The story of his youth is one; he was dragged about England and Ireland in the train of the regiment which his father served. His mother was a vulgar woman, daughter of sutler, and his father was a 'little smart man' who got the wound that killed him in a quarrel over a goose. The family trailed about, always in straits for money, from one garrison town to another. Sometimes they were taken in by a rich cousin, for the Sternes were of old descent; sometimes in crossing the Channel they were 'nearly cast away by a leak springing up on board ship'. Little brothers and sisters were born on their wanderings, and died, 'being of a fine delicate frame not made to last long'. Sterne, after the death of his father, was taken in charge by his cousin, Richard Sterne of Elvington, and sent to Cambridge. He sat with John Hall-Stevenson under a great walnut tree in the court of Jesus College, reading Rabelais, Rochester, and Aphra Behn, Homer, Virgil, and Theocritus, evil books and good books, so that they called the tree the tree of knowledge. Sterne, further, railed at 'rhetoric, logic, and metaphysics . . . amused that intellect should employ itself in that way'.

But it is at Sutton, eight miles from York, that we should like to pause and draw the portrait of the vicar. 'So slovenly was his dress and strange his gait, that the little boys used to flock round him and walk by his side.' He would stop on his way to church, if his pointer started a covey of partridges, and leave his flock without a sermon while he shot. Once, when his wife was out of her mind for a while and thought herself Queen of Bohemia, Sterne drove her through the stubble fields with bladders fastened to the wheels of her chaise to make a noise 'and then I told her this is the way they course in Bohemia'. He farmed his own land, played the violin, took lessons in painting and drawing, and drove into York for the races. In addition he was a violent partisan in the ecclesiastical disputes and drew Dr. Slop from the life. Then, when he was tired of parochial life he could drive over to the great stone house with the moat of stagnant water round it where John Hall-Stevenson lived, in retreat from the world, humouring his fancies. If the weathercock which he saw from his bed pointed to the north-east, for example, Mr. Hall-Stevenson

would lie all day in bed. If he could be induced to rise, he spent his time in writing indecent rhymes and in reading with his friend among the old and obscene books in the library. Then, in October, the brotherhood of the Demoniacs met at the Hall, in imitation of the monks of Medmenham Abbey; but it was a rustic copy, for they were 'noisy Yorkshire squires and gentlemen', who hunted by day, drank deep into the night, and told rude stories over their burgundy. Their spirit and their oddity (for they were the freaks of the countryside) rejoiced Sterne hugely, just as he loved the immense freedom of the old writers. When he was back in his parsonage again he had books all round him to take the place of talk. York was full of books, for the sales of the county took place there. Sterne's love of books reminds us sometimes of Charles Lamb. He loved the vast forgotten folios, where a lifetime of learning and fancy has been poured into the notes; he loved Burton and Bouchet and Bruscamille; Montaigne, Rabelais, and Cervantes he loved of course; but one may believe that he delighted most in his wild researches into medicine, midwifery, and military engineering. He was only brought to a stop by the difficulty of understanding in what way a cannon-ball travels, for the 'laws of the parabola' were not to his mind.

He was forty-five before it occurred to him that these vivid experiences among the parsons, the country peasants, and the wits of Crazy Castle had given him a view of the world which it would be possible to put into shape. The first books of *Tristram Shandy* were written at fever heat, 'quaint demons grinning and clawing at his head', ideas striking him as he walked, and sending him back home at a run to secure them. It is in this way that the first books still impress us; a wonderful conception, long imprisoned in the brain and delicately formed, seems to leap out, surprising and intoxicating the writer himself. He had found a key to the world. He thought he could go on like this, at the rate of two volumes a year, for ever, for a miracle had happened which turned all his experiences to words; to write about them was to be master of all that was in him and all that was to come. A slight knowledge of his life is enough to identify many of the characters with real people and to trace the humours of Uncle Toby and Mr. Shandy to the oddities of Crazy Castle and to the studies of the writer himself. But these are merely marks on the

surface, and the source from which they sprang lies very deep. Wilfully strange and whimsical of course Sterne was, but the spirit which inspires his humours and connects them is the spirit of the humorist; the world is an absurd place, and to prove it he invents absurdities which he shows to be as sensible as the views by which the world is governed. The stranger's nose, it will be remembered, 'just served as a frigate to launch them into a gulf of school divinity, and then they all sailed before the wind'. Whichever way the story winds it is accompanied by a jibing at 'great wigs, grave faces, and other implements of deceit', and thus the innumerable darts and spurts of fancy, in spite of their variety, have a certain likeness.

Shandy Hall, the home of cranks and eccentricities, nevertheless contrives to make the whole of the outer world appear heavy, and dull and brutal, and teased by innumerable imps. But it is probable that this effect is given quite as much by indirect means as by direct satire and parody. The form of the book, which seems to allow the writer to put down at once the first thought that comes into his head, suggests freedom; and then the thoughts themselves are so informal, so small, private, and far-fetched, that the reader is amazed and delighted to think how easy it must be to write. Even his indecency impresses one as an odd kind of honesty. In comparison other novels seem intolerably portly and platitudinous and remote from life. At the same time, what kind of life is it that Sterne can show us? It is easy to see that it has nothing in common with what, in the shorthand of speech, one calls 'real life'. Sterne skips immense tracts of living in order to concentrate upon the little whim or the oddity which most delighted him. His people are always at high pressure, with their brains in a state of abnormal activity. Their wills and their affections can make small way against their intellects. Uncle Toby, it will be remembered, picks up a Bible directly he has made his offer of marriage, and becomes so much engrossed by the siege of Jericho that he leaves his proposal 'to work with her after its own way'. When the news of his son's death reaches Mr. Shandy, his mind at once fills with the fine sayings of the philosophers, and in spouting them his private sorrow is completely forgotten. Nevertheless, although such reversals of ordinary experience startle us, they do not seem to us unnatural—they do

not turn to chill conceits—because Sterne, the first of ‘motive-mongers’, has observed the humours of man with an exquisite subtlety. His sphere is in the most exalted regions, where the thought and not the act is the thing criticized; where the thought, moreover, is almost completely severed from ordinary associations and the support of facts. Uncle Toby, with his simple questionings and avowals—‘You puzzle me to death’—plays a most important part by bringing his brother’s flights to earth and giving them that contrast with normal human thought in which the essence of humour lies.

Yet there are moments, especially in the later books of *Tristram Shandy*, where the hobby-horse is ridden to death, and Mr. Shandy’s invariable eccentricity tries our patience. The truth is that we cannot live happily in such fine air for long, and that we begin to become conscious of limitations; moreover, this astonishing vivacity has something a little chill about it. The same qualities that were so exhilarating at first—the malice, the wit, and the irresponsibility—are less pleasing when they seem less spontaneous, like the grin on a weary face; or, it may be, when one has had enough of them. A writer who feels his responsibility to his characters tries to give vent to portentous groans at intervals; he does his best to insist that he is a showman merely, that his judgments are fallible, and that a great mystery lies round us all. But Sterne’s sense of humour will suffer no mystery to settle on his page; he is never sublime like Meredith, but on the other hand he is never ridiculous like Thackeray. When he wished to get some relief from his fantastic brilliancy, he sought it in the portrayal of exquisite instants and pangs of emotion. The famous account of Uncle Toby and the fly—“Go,” says he, lifting up the sash, and opening his hand as he spoke, to let it escape; “go, poor devil; get thee gone, why should I hurt thee? The world surely is wide enough to hold both thee and me”—is followed by a description of the effect which such words had upon Sterne himself. They ‘instantly set my whole frame into one vibration of most pleasurable sensation’. It is this strange contradiction, as it seems, between feeling pain and joy acutely, and at the same time, observing and admiring his own power to do so, that has thrown so much discredit upon the famous ‘sentimentality’, and has so much perplexed his admirers. The amazing truth of these

observations is the best proof that he felt them; but when it becomes obvious that he has now time to think of himself our attention strays also, and we ask irrelevant questions—whether, for instance, Sterne was a good man. Sometimes—the incident of the donkey in *Tristram Shandy* is a good example—his method is brilliantly successful, for he touches upon the emotion, and passes on to show us how it travels through his mind, and what associations cling to it; different ideas meet and disperse, naturally as it seems; and the whole scene is lit for the moment with air and colour. In *The Sentimental Journey*, however, Sterne seems anxious to suppress his natural curiosity, and to have a double intention in his sentiment—to convey a feeling to the reader, but with the object of winning admiration for his own simple virtues. It is when his unmixed sentiment falls very flat that we begin to ask ourselves whether we like the writer, and to call him hypocrite. ‘The *pauvre honteux* [to whom Sterne had given alms] could say nothing; he pull’d out a little handkerchief, and wiped his face as he turned away—and I thought he thanked me more than them all.’ The last words, with their affectation of simplicity, are like eyes turned unctuously to Heaven.

There is abundant evidence in the story of his life to show how strange and complicated was the state of mind that produced such works of art. Sterne was a man of many passions, driven ‘according as the fly stings’; but the most serious was said to have been inspired by Mrs. Draper, the Eliza of the letters. Nevertheless, sentiments that had done duty for his wife in 1740 were copied out, with a change of name, and made to serve again for Eliza, in the year 1767; and again if he had turned a phrase happily in writing to Eliza, Lydia, his daughter, was given the benefit of it. Shall we infer from this that Sterne cared nothing for wife or mistress or daughter, or shall we believe that he was, before everything else, and with all the failing of his kind, a great artist? If he had been among the greatest, no doubt these little economies would not have been necessary; but with his exquisite and penetrating but not very exuberant genius it was essential to make shifts and to eke out as best he might. Accordingly, we have, as Professor Cross demonstrates, the strange spectacle of a man who uses his emotions twice over, for different purposes. The *Journal to Eliza* in which the most secret passions of his heart are

laid bare is but the note-book for passages in *The Sentimental Journey* which all the world may read. Sterne himself, no doubt, scarcely knew at what point his own pain was dissolved in the joy of an artist. We at this distance of time, might speculate indefinitely.

Indeed, however we may test it, there is no life which is harder to judge; its eccentricities are often genuine, and its impulses are often premeditated. In the same way the final impression is two-fold in its nature, for we must combine a life of extraordinary flightiness and oddity with the infinite painstaking and self-consciousness of an artist. This thin, excitable man, who was devoured by consumption, who said of himself that he generally acted on the first impulse, and was a bundle of sensations scarcely checked by reason, not only kept a record of all that he felt, but could sit close at his table, arranging and rearranging, adding and altering, until every scene was clear, every tone was felt, and each word was fit and in its place. 'How do the slight touches of the chisel', he exclaimed in *Tristram Shandy*, 'the pencil, the pen, the fiddle stick, et cetera, give the true swell, which gives the true pleasure! O, my fellow countrymen!—be nice; be cautious of your language—and never, O! never let it be forgotten upon what small particles your eloquence and your fame depend.' His fame depends partly upon that inimitable style, but rests most safely upon the extraordinary zest with which he lived, and upon the joy with which his mind worked ceaselessly upon the world.

## Sterne's Ghost<sup>1</sup>

THAT men have ghosts; that ghosts revisit the places where life ran quickest; that Sterne therefore haunts no churchyard, but the room where *Tristram Shandy* was written—all this may be taken for granted; even if we find it no such easy matter to decide in what mood and with what motives the ghost of Sterne beat regularly at midnight upon the wall of Mrs. Simpson's best bedroom in Stonegate, Yorks.

Mrs. Simpson made no secret of the matter, which perhaps was too notorious to be concealed. Owing to the ghost, she told the young Mathews, she would let the rooms, large as they were and convenient for the theatre, very cheap indeed, and perceiving something in Mrs. Mathews's aspect which made her think her, as indeed she was, 'a candidate for literary gains', she added how it was in this room and at that very table that a very famous book called *Tristram Shandy* was written, she believed, some forty years before. Even without its literary associations the cheapness of the lodging was enough to excuse the ghost, for the young Mathews were extremely poor—Charles acting at a salary of twenty-five shillings a week in Tate Wilkinson's company, but Tate did not scruple to tell him that with his screwed-up face and threadpaper body he had better keep a shop than go upon the stage, while poor Eliza, the girl whom Charles had married, out of pity, the second Mrs. Mathews said, without '*really* loving her', and not a penny to her name, which happened to be Strong. And Strong she had need to be, said Charles's father, strong in character, strong in health, strong in principles, strong in affections, if she became the wife of the misguided boy who so wantonly preferred the stage and all its evils to selling serious books to saintly personages in the Strand. But Eliza herself was conscious of one source of strength only (besides that she was very much in love with her husband) and that was her gift for writing—her passion for literature. When Mrs. Simpson at one and the same moment lowered the rent and mentioned Sterne, the bargain was struck and the rooms taken. The ghost must be endured.

That necessity arose, indeed, the very first night the Mathews

<sup>1</sup> Written in 1925



went to bed. As York Minster struck the first chimes of midnight three powerful blows resounded on the wall at the back of the young couple's bed. The same thing happened night after night. York Minster had only to begin striking twelve and the ghost struck three. Watch was set; experiments were made; but whether it was the ghost of Sterne or the malevolence of some ill-wisher, no cause could be discovered and the young people could only move their bed, and shift their bedtime, which, as the play-house hours were late and Charles had a passion for reading or talking late at night, was a matter of not much difficulty. Such courage could hardly have been expected of so frail a woman. But unfortunately Eliza had a reason for tolerating ghosts, if they reduced the rent, which she dared not tell her husband. Every week, like the honest and affectionate creature he was, he poured his salary—twenty-five shillings—into her lap, and every week she assured him that twenty-five shillings was ample—all their bills were paid. But every week a certain number, an increasing number, for all she could do to keep their expenses down, were slipped, unpaid, into Sterne's table drawer. Eliza perhaps had some inkling of the fact that her husband had married her impetuously in the goodness of his heart, from pity that the only child of the late Dr. Strong should have to support herself by inculcating the principles of arithmetic into the daughters of the gentlemen of Swansea. At any rate, she was determined that he should never suffer for his generosity. Comforts he must have, and if twenty-five shillings a week were not enough to pay for them she would pay for them herself out of her own earnings. She was confident that she could do it. She would write a novel, a novel like *Tristram Shandy* perhaps, save that her knowledge of life was unfortunately limited, which would set all London in a roar. And then she would come to her husband with the bills receipted and her deception confessed, and give him the proceeds of her famous novel to do what he liked with. But that day was still far distant—at present she must work. While Charles was acting and reading, while Charles, who loved talk and hated bedtime, was gossiping and chattering and taking off odd characters, so that he was famous in the green-room whatever he might be upon the stage, Eliza wrote. She wrote every kind of piece—novels, sonnets, elegies, love songs. The publishers took

them, the publishers printed them, but they never paid her a penny for them, and on she toiled, always carefully concealing her work from her husband, so that his surprise when the day of revelation came might be entire.

Meanwhile the bills accumulated, and act as Charles might (and there were some young ladies in York who thought him the finest comic actor they had ever seen, and would stand a whole evening in the wings to hear him) his salary remained twenty-five shillings and no more. It was useless for the ghost to knock; useless for Eliza's back to ache; useless for her good brother-in-law William to implore her to write everything twice over, peruse the best works of the best authors, and find mottoes for all her chapters—she had no choice; write she must. Surely the novel she was now engaged on—*What Has Been*—promised better than the others, and with a little help from William, who knew Mr. Wordsworth and could perhaps solicit the favours of reviewers, might, indeed must, bring her fame. Sitting where Sterne had sat, writing where Sterne had written, the omens were auspicious.

There, at any rate, long after the ghost had knocked thrice and York Minster had tolled twelve times, she sat writing. She neglected to take exercise. She never allowed herself to stand in the wings a whole evening to see her Charles in his comic parts. At last signs of exhaustion become apparent. Alarmed by her wasted looks, Charles brought a doctor to see her. But one glance was enough. Nothing could now be done. Whatever the cause, lack of exercise or lack of food, or whether the nervous strain of hearing those three taps delivered nightly had hopelessly injured her constitution, consumption was far advanced; and all the doctor could do was to prescribe apothecaries' stuff, which, expensive as it was, Charles feared to be useless.

Eliza was now confined to bed. Her projects had totally failed. *What Has Been* appeared, but, even corrected and at least partially supplied with mottoes by the kindness of Mr. William Mathews, failed like its predecessors, and she was at an end of her resources. Even so, the worst was still to come. The butcher or the baker stopped Charles in the street and demanded payment. The drawer and its bills had to be revealed. The whole of her miserable, innocent, overwhelming deception must be confessed. Charles took the blow like an angel, said not a word of complaint,

though the bills were to hang about his neck for years to come. And now, for the first time, the ghost fell silent. York Minster struck midnight and there was no reply. But really the silence was worse than the sound! To lie and wait for the three stout strokes as York Minster struck twelve, and then to hear nothing—that seemed to convey a more appalling message than the blow itself—as if the enemy had worked its will and gone its way. But this very silence inspired Eliza Mathews with a desperate courage. With the ghost quiescent, the novels unsold, the bills unpaid, Charles all day at the playhouse, often cast down by his failure and the thought of his father's displeasure—for the God-fearing bookseller in the Strand, where the whole house was hung with portraits of the Saints framed in ebony, and canting humbugs bamboozled the simple old tradesman out of his livelihood, had been justified in his warnings—with all this that she had caused, or failed to prevent, to oppress her, and the daily decline of her own health to appal, Eliza framed a terrible and desperate resolve. There was a girl at the playhouse for whom she had an affection, a singer who was friendless as Eliza herself had been, and timid and charming. For this young woman, Anne Jackson by name, Eliza sent. She was better, Eliza claimed, as Anne came in, and indeed her looks confirmed it; much better, because of an idea that had come to her, which she counted on her friend's help to carry out. First, before her husband came back, she wished to be propped up in bed, in order, she said mysteriously, 'to be able to look at you both while I reveal my project'. Directly Charles Mathews appeared, and exclaimed in his turn at her sparkle, her animation, she began. Sitting up, forced often to pause for breath, she said how she knew her fate; death was inevitable; how the thought of her husband's loneliness oppressed her—worse, the thought that he would marry again a woman who did not understand him. Here she paused exhausted, and Charles looked at Anne and Anne at Charles, as if to ask had she lost her reason? On she went again. It was even worse, she said, to think of Anne left in her youth and inexperience without such help as she, Eliza, might have given her. Thoughts of this kind embittered her last moments. Surely, then, they would grant the last request she would ever make? She took her husband's hand and kissed it; then took her friend's and kissed that too 'in a

solemn manner, which I remember made me tremble all over', and at last framed her terrible request. Would they, there and then, pledge themselves to marry each other when she was dead?

Both were flabbergasted. Anne burst into floods of tears. Never, she cried, never could she contemplate marriage with Mr. Mathews. She esteemed him; she admired him; she thought him the first comic actor of the age; that was all. Charles himself fairly scolded the dying woman for putting them in such an awful predicament. He ran after the sobbing girl to implore her to believe that it was none of his doing—that his wife was raving and no longer knew what she said. And so Eliza died. For months a coldness, an awkwardness, existed between the widower and his wife's friend. They scarcely met. Then at the same moment on the same night the same vision visited them, far apart as they were, in their sleep. Eliza came imploring to the side of each. Well, said Anne, it must be destiny; Shakespeare said so; 'marriage comes of destiny', he said, and she was disposed to agree with Shakespeare. Twelve months after she had sworn that she could never feel anything but esteem for Mr. Mathews, she was his wife.

But what conclusion are we led to draw from the behaviour of Sterne's ghost? Was it malicious or tender, did it come to warn or to mock, or merely to dip its handkerchief once more in the tears of lovers? Nobody could say. Charles Mathews told the story of the Stonegate ghost a hundred times in the green-room at York, but nobody came forward with an explanation. Again one night he was telling the story, when an old actress who had returned to the stage after a long absence and had heard nothing of the ghost or of the Mathews, exclaimed in astonishment 'Why, that was my dear Billy Leng!' And then she told them how they lodged next-door to Mrs. Simpson's in Stonegate; how her dear Billy had been bedridden for many years; how, as his infirmities increased, so did his fear of robbers; how, being the most methodical of men, and growing more so with age, he waited always for York Minster to chime midnight and then took his crutch-handled stick and beat forcibly on the calico at the back of his bed to warn any thief who might be concealed there. 'It was no ghost,' she cried, 'it was my dear Billy Leng!'

Cleared of the imputation which the ghost of Sterne had cast

STERNE'S GHOST

upon them, Mrs. Simpson now let her rooms for the ordinary sum.

## Eliza and Sterne<sup>1</sup>

OF the many difficulties which afflict the biographer, the moral difficulty must surely be the greatest. By what standard, that is to say, is he to judge the morals of the dead? By that of their day, or that of his own? Or should he, before putting pen to paper, arrive at some absolute standard of right and wrong by which he can try Socrates and Shelley and Byron and Queen Victoria and Mr. Lloyd George? The problem, though it lies at the root of biography and affects it in every fibre, is for the most part solved or shelved by taking it for granted that the truth was revealed about the year 1850 to the fortunate natives of the British Isles, who need only in future take into account circumstances of date, country, and sex in order to come to a satisfactory conclusion upon all cases of moral eccentricity submitted to their judgment. If we write the life of Elizabeth Draper, for instance, we must lay great stress upon the question of the morality or immorality of her relations with Sterne. We must ransack the evidence and profess relief or censure as the balance sways for her or against. We must attach more importance to her conduct in this respect than in any other. Mr. Wright and Mr. Sclater go through the ceremony with rigid consistency. Her 'moral culpability' is debated at every point, and we are invited to assist at a trial which, as it proceeds, comes to have less and less reality either for us or for anybody else. But in saying that we admit no levity. We are only saying what every reader of biography knows but few writers care to confess—that times are changed; that in 1850 Eliza would not have been invited to Court, but that in 1922 we should all be delighted to sit next her at dinner.

Yet morality, though it may be the crucial difficulty, is by no means the only difficulty that the biographer has to face. There are the white ants of Anjengo—'a peculiarly voracious breed', who, not satisfied with devouring the 'bulk of the old archives' of a town which is at once the birthplace of Eliza and the seat of the pepper industry, have eaten away a much more precious

<sup>1</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, December 14th, 1922

material—the life of Eliza herself. Again and again her conscientious biographers have to admit that the facts are lost. ‘History . . . is often most tantalizingly silent upon points of real interest.’ The chief actor leaves the stage, often at the crisis of her fate, and in her absence our attention is directed to the antiseptic quality of wood ashes in the treatment of smallpox; to the different natures of the Hooka, the Calloon, and the Kerim Can; to the method, still in vogue, of hunting deer with cheetahs; and to the fact that one of Eliza’s uncles was killed by a sack of caraway seeds falling on his head as he walked up St. Mary-at-Hill in the year 1778. These familiar diversions, which do not perhaps advance the cause of biography, are excusable when the subject is, as Eliza Draper was, an obscure woman, dead almost a century and a half, whose thirty-five years would have been utterly forgotten were it not that for three months in one of them she was loved by Laurence Sterne.

She was loved, but the depredations of time and the white ants leave us in little doubt that the love was on his side, not on hers. If she was anybody’s Eliza (which is by no means certain) she was Thomas Limbrey Sclater’s Eliza. To him she wrote affectionately all her life; to him she sent one of Sterne’s love-letters; and it was of him she thought when the ship was carrying her back to India and away from Sterne for ever. She should have had more sense of the becoming. She should have realized the predicament in which she places posterity. But Eliza was a woman of impulse rather than of reflection. ‘Committing matrimony’, as her sister called it, with Daniel Draper of Bombay at the age of fourteen she ruined her chances for ever. He was thirty-four, had several illegitimate children, was afflicted with the writer’s cramp, and possessed all those virtues which lead officials to the highest promotion and make their wives jump into the arms of Commodore Clarke.

‘ . . . By nature cool, Phlegmatic, and not adorned by Education with any of those pleasing Acquirements which help to fill up the Vacuums of time agreeably, if not usefully, added to which, Methodically formed, in the Extreme, by long habit, and not easily roused into active measures by any Motive Unconnected with his sense of duty.’

Such a man (Eliza wrote of her husband in words which, since

her emotions were strong and her grammar weak, we take the liberty of paraphrasing) is quite unfitted to be the husband of a lady entitled to 'the Appellation of Belle Indian'; who loved society much but solitude more; who read Montaigne and the *Spectator*; who was fourth if not third upon the Governor's invitation list; who wrote letters which some thought worthy of publication; who had been told finally by a friend that nature designed her for the wife of 'a very feeling Poet and Philosopher, rather than to a Gentleman of Independance and General Talents, and the reason he was pleased to assign to it was, the natural and supposed qualities of my heart, together with an expressive Countenance and a manner capable of doing justice to the tender Passions'.

This 'acknowledged Judge of Physiognomy' was, we may guess, no less a person than the great Mr. Sterne. Eliza met him at the house of Mrs. James in Gerrard Street in the year 1767. Draper's increasing cramp had the somewhat incongruous effect of bringing them together. Having tried the English spas without success, Draper returned to Bombay and Eliza was left in London to continue the conversation with Sterne. From the *Journal to Eliza* we can judge fairly accurately what they talked about. Eliza was the most charming of women, Sterne the most passionate of men. Life was cruel, Mrs. Sterne intolerable, early marriages deplorable, Bombay distant, and husbands exacting. The only happiness to mingle thoughts and tears, to share ecstasies and exchange portraits, and pray for some miracle, such as the simultaneous deaths of Elizabeth Sterne and Daniel Draper, which might unite them eternally in the future. But though this was undoubtedly what they said, it is no such easy matter to be certain what they meant. Sterne was fifty-four, and Eliza twenty-two. Sterne was at the height of his fame, and Eliza at the height not of her beauty, which was little, but of her charm, which was great. But Sterne was engaged in writing *The Sentimental Journey*, and Eliza must sometimes have felt that though it was most wonderful and flattering to have a celebrated author sitting by her bedside when she fell ill, and reading her letters aloud to the ladies and gentlemen of the highest rank, and displaying her picture, and buying ten handsome brass screws for her cabin, and running her errands round London, still he was fifty-four, had a dreadful



cough, and sometimes, she noticed, looked out of the window in a very curious way. No doubt he was thinking about his writing. He assured her that he found her of the very greatest help. And he told her that he had brought her name and picture into his work, 'where', he said, 'they will remain when you and I are at rest'; and he went on to write an elegy upon her, and no doubt worked himself up into one of those accesses of emotion which any woman would have given her eyes to inspire, yet lying ill in bed Eliza found them a little fatiguing, and could not help thinking that Thomas Limbrey Sclater, who was not in the least likely to become immortal, was a great deal more to her taste than Laurence Sterne. Thus, if we must censure Eliza, it is not for being in love with Sterne, but for not being in love with him. She let him write her the letters of a lover and propose to her the rights of a husband. But when she reached India she had almost forgotten him, and his death recalled only 'the mild generous good Yorick' whose picture hung, not above her heart, but over her writing-table.

Arrived in India with eleven years of life before her, the provoking creature proceeded to live them as if she did not care a straw for those 'Annotators and Explainers' who would, Sterne said, busy themselves in after-ages with their names. She gave herself up to trivial interests and nameless captains; to sitting till three in the morning upon a 'cool Terrasse'; to hunting antelopes with leopards; to driving down the streets of Tellicherry with an escort of armed Sepoys; to playing with her children and pouring out her soul in long, long letters to Mr. Sclater and Mrs. James; to that petty process of living, in short, which is of such inexplicable interest to others engaged in the same pursuit. It is all very obscure and highly conjectural. She was very happy at Tellicherry in the year 1769 and very unhappy in the year 1770. She was always being happy and then unhappy and blaming herself and hoping that her daughter would be a better woman than her mother. Yet Eliza did not think altogether badly of herself. It was her complexion that was to blame, and the 'happy flexibility' of her temper. Vain, charming, gifted, sympathetic, her relations with her husband grew steadily more and more desperate. At last, when it was quite certain that Draper loved Leeds, her maid, and neither on Tuesday nor on Wednesday did

he say that word 'sympathetick of regret' which 'would have saved me the perilous adventure', Eliza either jumped from her window into a boat or was otherwise conveyed to the flagship of Sir John Clarke and thence to her uncle's house at Masulipatam. This time, without a doubt, her biographers regretfully conclude, 'Eliza was "lost" '. But Eliza was not in the least of that opinion herself. She turned up imperturbably in Queen Anne Street, Cavendish Square, 'which shows that she had considerable social resources'; but there, alas, proceeded to fall in love with the Abbé Raynal. Was she incorrigible or was he, perhaps like others of his countrymen, apt to exaggerate? The terms in which he addressed Anjengo would lead one to suspect the latter. But death, with infinite discretion, spares us the inquiry. Eliza died at the age of thirty-five, and some unknown friend raised a monument to her memory in Bristol Cathedral with the figures of Genius and Benevolence on either side and a bird in the act of feeding its young. So after all somebody liked Eliza, and it is as certain as anything can be that a woman with such a tombstone was moving in the highest circles of Bristol society at the time of her death.

## Horace Walpole<sup>1</sup>

ONE hundred and ten letters by Horace Walpole are here printed by Dr. Toynbee for the first time.<sup>2</sup> These, together with twenty-three now printed in full, new matter from hitherto unpublished material, and Dr. Toynbee's notes, make up two volumes of rare delight. If the two volumes were ten we should still urge Dr. Toynbee to fresh researches; we should still welcome the discovery of a large chest put away in some old country house and stuffed to the brim with Walpole's letters. Although there is nothing in the new letters of surpassing brilliance, nothing that draws a new line on the familiar face, there is once more, and for too short a time, the peculiar and unmistakable pleasure of Walpole's society. He does not need to be brilliant; he does not need to be indiscreet; let him draw up to the table, take the pen in his gouty fingers, and write—anything, everything, so long as he continues to write. These last letters, swept up from many different sources with intervals between them and lacking continuity, are yet neither trivial nor disconnected. We fall into step at once. We take our delightful promenade through the greater part of the eighteenth century. We see in passing many old friends. It is as entertaining as ever. The first solemn chimes of the nineteenth century, which mean that Horace Walpole must retire, are as vexatious to us as the clock that strikes and sends a child complaining up to bed.

Perhaps it is fanciful to detect the charm of the mature Walpole in 'My first letter to my mother', with which the book opens: 'Dear Mama, I hop you are wall and I am very wall and I hop papa is wall . . . and I am very glad to hear by Tom that all my cruataurs ar all wall'. Yet this is an engaging letter, as the dark-eyed little boy in the miniature is a charming little boy; and there can be no doubt that Walpole far sooner than most children knew his own mind and could overcome the difficulties of spelling.

<sup>1</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, July 31st, 1919.

<sup>2</sup> Supplement to the Letters of Horace Walpole, fourth Earl of Orford. Chronologically arranged and edited with notes and indices by Paget Toynbee. Two volumes.

There was never a transition stage of awkward immaturity when he said more than he meant, or less than he meant, or what he did not mean. At the age of twenty-three he appears in Rome a complete man of the world, and so much his own master that he can already quiz the great ladies who are seeing the sights, execute commissions for fans and snuff-boxes, exchange compliments with learned men, keep his own mind admirably free from enthusiasm, and end a letter:

Good-night, child, I am in a violent hurry. Oh, Porto Bello, the delightful news! Corradini is certainly to be Pope, and soon. Next post I shall probably be able to tell you he certainly is not.

The author of that sentence is already completely equipped for his part. He has broken the back of the stubborn English tongue; for evermore it is going to run his errands, carry his light burdens, do his behests; he has at his disposal an indefatigable slave. More than that, he has already taken up his position, sees the spectacle from his own angle, and for close on eighty years there will he stand, witty, malicious, observant, detached, the liveliest of gossips, the most alert of friends. The son of a Prime Minister endowed with a handsome sinecure, a position of some sort was assured him had he been both dunce and dullard. But Horace Walpole was not a dullard, and he was much more than the son of a Prime Minister. He stood out against his hereditary doom with a resolution which commands our respect, though it has caused him to be disparaged since, as no doubt it raised a laugh against him at the time. He would not drink; he would not dice; he would not be a country gentleman; he would not be a politician. He would, in short, be nothing save what it pleased him to be.

On the whole it pleased him best to be a gentleman, for there is no reason why a gentleman should not write the wittiest letters in the world, provided that he does it carelessly, and has for correspondents the most exalted and the most accomplished of his time. The chief characteristic of this class he had acquired very young, perhaps at the cost of some labour—even, it is possible, of some renunciation. ‘Good-night, child, I am in a violent hurry.’ Whatever pains his letter had cost him, it was essential to pass it off as the merest trifle, something dashed down while he waited for the rain to stop—something, as the phrasing

shows, spontaneous, careless, but spoken naturally in a tone of the highest breeding. He was careful to repeat the boast that he was in a violent hurry whenever he wrote anything. As for rhapsody of emotion or profundity of learning, those qualities he left to the professional writers who had only their brains to live by. Moreover, it is permissible for the amateur to spend his time over problems which fascinated Walpole, though no man of sense could waste a thought upon them. Since no one, himself least of all, took him seriously, he could devote several pages to the discussion of that difficult and vexed question—the age at which Lady Desmond died. Was she really 163, and could it be possible that she had danced with Richard the Third? For some reason these questions stirred his imagination. His eagerness to know the exact condition of Queen Catherine Parr's corpse, when it was dug up and examined, would seem excessive—save indeed that the lady was of the highest rank. For it is not possible to deny that he was a snob, and of the determined breed whose mothers have been Shorters while their fathers, though not of noble birth, have been exalted by their abilities to familiar converse with the great. Yet once that dart is levelled, no other can find a lodgment. It is not easy to call him dilettante or gossip, poetaster or dandy, when before these charges are out of your mouth the culprit has owned them of his own accord and gone out of his way to pronounce his sentence:

Good God! Sir, what am I that I should be offended at, or above, criticism or correction? I do not know who ought to be—I am sure no author. I am a private man of no consequence, and at best an author of very moderate abilities.

Even in matters of taste, upon which he had spent most of his life and a large part of his fortune, he was open to correction by people possessed of greater learning than he could claim. He was nothing but a private gentleman.

The reader will perceive that the habit of understatement is not only the essence of good breeding, but also a tool of great value in the hand of a writer. An author who knows no more than other people, who has no dignity to keep up, no convictions to enforce, no philosophy to expound, can say what he likes and think what he chooses. No one need attend to him. But if, in

addition, by a mere stroke of luck, he possesses the wittiest of pens and the most observant of eyes, if he knows everybody worth knowing and sees everything worth seeing, we shall of course get every word he writes by heart. Since, however, writers should be serious, we shall in revenge allow him very little credit for his performance. It is the fashion to say that Walpole was so amusing because he was so frivolous, so witty because he was so heartless. He was certainly very much put out when old Madame du Deffand fell in love with him, and thought that at her age she could afford to talk about it openly. 'Dès le moment que je cessai d'être jeune, j'ai eu une peur horrible de devenir un vieillard ridicule', he wrote to her; and she replied, 'Vos craintes sur le ridicule sont des terreurs paniques, mais on ne guérit point de la peur; je n'ai point vu une semblable faiblesse'. He was terribly afraid of ridicule, and yet the old lady, whose passion he had snubbed, showed considerable penetration when she spoke of 'l'extrême vérité de votre caractère'. Understatement long persisted in, partly from motives of taste and propriety and partly from fear of ridicule, had disciplined Walpole's emotions so that they scarcely dared show themselves above ground; yet what there is of them, as sometimes happens with emotions repressed rather than exploited, rings startlingly true. '... he loved me and I did not think he did', he wrote of his quarrel with Gray, when Gray was dead. But as for his heart, let that rest in peace; there is some indecency in prying into it, and he would certainly prefer that we should credit him with none at all than allow him a grain too much. His brain is our affair.

And yet here once more shall we not be guilty of some credulity if we accept him entirely at his own estimate? The affectation of indifference, the pose of amateurishness, were common foibles at that time among men of birth whose brains could not abstain altogether from the inkpot. But perhaps there were moments when Walpole wished that his father's name had been Shorter as well as his mother's, and that fate had required him to use pen and paper in earnest and not merely provide them, at a handsome salary, for the use of the young men at the Treasury. At any rate his warmest praises in the present volume are not for Lady Di's illustrations in 'Sut water' to the Mysterious Mother, nor even for Mrs. Damer's model of 'a shock dog in wax', but for the

plays of Shakespeare. 'Moi, je me ferais brûler pour la primauté de Shakespeare.' Admiring the French and owing much to them, still when it comes to tragedy what are Voltaire and Racine and Corneille, compared with Shakespeare? How did Voltaire dare criticize Shakespeare? 'Grossly ignorant and tasteless' was he not to see that the phrase 'a bare bodkin' is as sublime in one way as the simplicity of Lady Percy's speech is sublime in another? 'I had rather have written the two speeches of Lady Percy in the second part of *Henry IV* than all Voltaire. . . . But my enthusiasm for Shakespeare runs away with me.' That is, indeed, an unwonted spectacle. But perhaps young Mr. Jephson, the playwright, owed all this talk about Shakespeare and the English language 'far more energie, and more sonorous too, than the French', and these interesting speculations about 'a novel diction', 'a very new and peculiar style' which might have amazing effect, 'by fixing on some region of whose language we have little or no idea'—perhaps Mr. Jephson drew all this down upon himself because the old dandy and aristocrat did for the time being envy young Mr. Jephson, who could set himself seriously to the task of writing and need not, since his name was Jephson, scribble off a tragedy 'in a violent hurry'.

A queer sort of imagination haunted the seemingly prosaic edifice of Walpole's mind. What but imagination gone astray and vagrant over pots and pans instead of firmly held in place was his love of knick-knacks and antiquities, Strawberry hills and decomposing royalties? And once at least Walpole made a little confession to Madame du Deffand. Of all his works he preferred *The Castle of Otranto*, for there he said 'j'ai laissé courir mon imagination; les visions et les passions m'échauffaient'. Vision and passion are not the gifts that we should ascribe offhand to Horace Walpole; and yet as we lose ourselves in the enormous variety and entertainment of his letters we must allow that somehow from his own angle he saw truly, he judged independently. Somehow he was not only the wittiest of men, but the most observant and not the least kindly. And among the writers of English prose he wears for ever and with a peculiar grace a coronet of his own earning.

## Two Antiquaries: Walpole and Cole

SINCE to criticize the Yale edition of Horace Walpole's letters to Cole is impossible, for there cannot in the whole universe exist a single human being whose praise or blame of such minute and monumental learning can be of any value—if such exists his knowledge has been tapped already—the only course for the reader is to say nothing about the learning and the industry, the devotion and the skill which have created these two huge volumes, and to record merely such fleeting thoughts as have formed in the mind from a single reading. To encourage ourselves, let us assert, though not with entire confidence, that books after all exist to be read—even the most learned of editors would to some extent at least agree with that. But how, the question immediately arises, can we read this magnificent instalment—for these are but the first two volumes of this edition in which Mr. Lewis will give us the complete correspondence—of our old friend Horace Walpole's letters? Ought not the presses to have issued in a supplementary pocket a supplementary pair of eyes? Then, with the usual pair fixed upon the text, the additional pair could range the notes, thus sweeping together into one haul not only what Horace is saying to Cole and what Cole is saying to Horace, but a multitude of minor men and matters: for example, Thomas Farmer, who ran away and left two girls with child; Thomas Wood, who was never drunk but had a bad constitution and was therefore left fifty pounds and bed and furniture in Cole's will; Cole's broken leg, how it was broken, and why it was badly mended; Birch, who had (it is thought) an apoplectic fit riding in the Hampstead Road, fell from his horse, and died; Thomas Western (1695-1754), who was one of the pall-bearers at the funeral of Cole's father; Cole's niece, the daughter of a wholesale cheesemonger; John Woodyer, a man of placid disposition and great probity; Mrs. Allen Hopkins, who was born Mary Thornhill; and Lord Montfort, who—but if we want to know more about that nobleman, his lions and tigers and his 'high-spirited and riotous behaviour', we must look it up for ourselves in the Harwicke MSS. in the British Museum. There are limits even to Mr. Lewis.



This little haul, taken at random, is enough to show how great a strain the new method of editing lays upon the eye. But if the brain is at first inclined to jib at such perpetual solicitations, and to beg to be allowed to read the text in peace, it adjusts itself by degrees; grudgingly admits that many of these little facts are to the point; and finally becomes not merely a convert but a suppliant—asks not for less but for more and more and more. Why, to take one instance only, is not the name of Cole's temporary cook's sister divulged? Thomas Wood was his servant; Thomas was left fifty pounds and allowed Cole's coach to run away; Thomas's younger brother James, known as 'Jem', ran errands successfully and had a child ready to be sworn to him; their sister, Molly, was for one month at least a cook and helped in the kitchen. But there was another sister and, after learning all about the Woods, it is positively painful not to know at least her Christian name.

Yet it may be asked, what has the name of Cole's cook's sister got to do with Horace Walpole? That is a question which it is impossible to answer briefly; but it is proof of the editor's triumph, justification of his system, and a complete vindication of his immense labour that he has convinced us, long before the end, that somehow or other it all hangs together. The only way to read letters is to read them thus stereoscopically. Horace is partly Cole; Cole is partly Horace; Cole's cook is partly Cole; therefore Horace Walpole is partly Cole's cook's sister. Horace, the whole Horace, is made up of innumerable facts and reflections of facts. Each is infinitely minute; yet each is essential to the other. To elicit them and relate them is out of the question. Let us, then, concentrate for a moment upon the two main figures, in outline.

We have here, then, in conjunction the Honourable Horace Walpole and the Reverend William Cole. But they were two very different people. Cole, it is true, had been at Eton with Horace, where he was called by the famous Walpole group 'Tozhy', but he was not a member of that group, and socially he was greatly Walpole's inferior. His father was a farmer, Horace's father was a Prime Minister. Cole's niece was the daughter of a cheesemonger; Horace's niece married a Prince of the Blood Royal. But Cole was a man of solid good sense who made no bones of this disparity, and, after leaving Eton and Cambridge, he had

become, in his quiet frequently flooded parsonage, one of the first antiquaries of the time. It was this common passion that brought the two friends together again.

For some reason, obscurely hidden in the psychology of the human race, the middle years of that eighteenth century which seems now a haven of bright calm and serene civilization, affected some who actually lived in it with a longing to escape—from its politics, from its wars, from its follies, from its drabness and its dullness, to the superior charms of the Middle Ages. 'I . . . hope', wrote Cole in 1765, 'by the latter end of the week to be among my admired friends of the twelfth or thirteenth century. Indeed you judge very right concerning my indifference about what is going forward in the world, where I live in it as though I was no way concerned about it except in paying, with my contemporaries, the usual taxes and impositions. In good truth I am very indifferent about my Lord Bute or Mr. Pitt, as I have long been convinced and satisfied in my own mind that all oppositions are from the ins and the outs, and that power and wealth and dignity are the things struggled for, not the good of the whole. . . . I hope what I have said will not be offensive.' Only one weekly newspaper, the *Cambridge Chronicle*, brought him news of the present moment. There at Bletchley or at Milton he sat secluded, wrapped up from the least draught, for he was terribly subject to sore throats; sometimes issuing forth to conduct a service, for he was, incidentally, a clergyman; driving occasionally to Cambridge to hobnob with his cronies; but always returning with delight to his study, where he copied maps, filled in coats of arms, and pored assiduously over those budgets of old manuscripts which were, as he said, 'wife and children' to him. Now and again, it is true, he looked out of the window at the antics of his dog, for whose future he was careful to provide, or at those guinea-fowl whose eggs he begged off Horace—for 'I have so few amusements and can see these creatures from my study window when I can't stir out of my room'.

But neither dog nor guinea-fowl seriously distracted him. The hundred and fourteen folio volumes left by him to the British Museum testify to his professional industry. And it was precisely that quality—his professional industry—that brought the two so dissimilar men together. For Horace Walpole was by tempera-

ment an amateur. He was not, Cole admitted, 'a true, genuine antiquary'; nor did he think himself one. 'Then I have a wicked quality in an antiquary, nay one that annihilates the essence; that is, I cannot bring myself to a habit of minute accuracy about very indifferent points', Horace admitted. '. . . I bequeath free leave of correction to the microscopic intellects of my continuators.' But he had what Cole lacked—imagination, taste, style, in addition to a passion for the romantic past, so long as that romantic past was also a civilized past, for mere 'bumps in the ground' or 'barrows and tumuli and Roman camps' bored him to death. Above all, he had a purse long enough to give visible and tangible expression—in prints, in gates, in Gothic temples, in bowers, in old manuscripts, in a thousand gimcracks and 'brittle transitory relics' to the smouldering and inarticulate passion that drove the professional antiquary to delve like some indefatigable mole underground in the darkness of the past. Horace liked his brittle relics to be pretty, and to be authentic, and he was always eager to be put on the track of more.

The greater part of the correspondence thus is concerned with antiquaries' gossip; with parish registers and cartularies; with coats of arms and the Christian names of bishops; with the marriages of kings' daughters; skeletons and prints; old gold rings found in a field; dates and genealogies; antique chairs in Fen farmhouses; bits of stained glass and old Apostle spoons. For Horace was furnishing Strawberry Hill; and Cole was prodigiously adept at stuffing it, until there was scarcely room to stick another knife or fork, and the gorged owner of all this priceless lumber had to cry out: 'I shudder when the bell rings at the gate. It is as bad as keeping an inn.' All the week he was plagued with staring crowds.

Were this all it would be, and indeed it sometimes is, a little monotonous. But they were two very different men. They struck unexpected sparks in one another. Cole's Walpole was not Conway's Walpole; nor was Walpole's Cole the good-natured old parson of the diary. Cole, of course, stressed the antiquary in Walpole; but he also brought out very clearly the limits of the antiquary in Walpole. Against Cole's monolithic passion his own appears frivolous and flimsy. On the other hand, in contrast with Cole's slow-plodding pen, his own shows its mettle. He cannot

flash, it is true—the subject, say, the names of Edward the Fourth's daughters, forbids it—yet how sweetly English sings on his side of the page, now in a colloquialism—‘a more flannel climate’—that Cole would never have ventured; now in a strain of natural music—‘Methinks as we grow old our only business here is to adorn the graves of our friends or to dig our own.’ That strain was called forth by the death of their common friend, Thomas Gray. It was a death that struck at Cole's heart, too, but produced no such echo in that robust organ. At the mere threat of Conway's death, Horace was all of a twitter—his nerves were ‘so aspen’. It was a threat only; ‘Still has it operated such a revolution in my mind, as no time, *at my age*, can efface. I have had dreams in which I thought I wished for fame—. . . I feel, I feel it was confined to the memory of those I love’—to which Cole replies: ‘For both your sakes I hope he will soon get well again. It is a misfortune to have so much sensibility in one's nature as you are endued with: sufficient are one's own distresses without the additional encumbrance of those of one's friends.’

Nevertheless, Cole was by no means without distresses of his own. There was that terrible occasion when the horses ran away and his hat blew off and he sat with his legs in the air anticipating either death at the tollgate or a bad cold. Mercifully both were spared him. Again, he suffered tortures when, showing Dr. Gulston his prints, he begged him, as a matter of form, to take any he liked; whereupon Gulston—‘that Algerine hog’—filled his portfolio with the most priceless. It is true that Cole made him pay for them in the end, but it was a most distressing business. And then what an agony it was when some fellow antiquaries dined with him, and, confined with the gout, he had to let them visit his study alone, to find next morning that an octavo volume, and a borrowed volume at that, was missing! ‘The Master is too honourable to take such a step’, but—he had his suspicions. And what was he to do? To confess the loss or to conceal it? To conceal it seemed better, and yet, if the owner found out, ‘I am undone’. Horace was all sympathy. He loathed the whole tribe of antiquaries—‘numskulls’ he called them mumbling manuscripts with their toothless jaws. ‘Their understandings seem as much in ruins as the things they describe’, he wrote. ‘I love

antiquities, but I scarce ever knew an antiquary who knew how to write upon them.'

He had all the aristocrat's contempt for the professional drudge, and no desire whatsoever to be included among the sacred band of professional authors. 'They are always in earnest, and think their profession serious, and dwell upon trifles, and reverence learning', he snapped out. And yet, when writing to Cole he could confess what to a man of his own class he would have concealed—that he, too, revered learning when it was real, and admired no one more than a poet if he was genuine. 'A page in a great author humbles me to the dust', he wrote. And after deriding his contemporaries added, 'Don't think me scornful. Recollect that I have seen Pope, and lived with Gray.'

Certainly Cole's obscure but bulky form revealed a side of Horace Walpole that was lost in the glitter of the great world. With that solid man of no social gift but prodigious erudition Horace showed himself not an antiquary, not a poet, not a historian, but what he was—the aristocrat of letters, the born expert who knew the sham intellect from the genuine as surely as the antiquary knew the faked genealogy from the authentic. When Horace Walpole praised Pope and Gray he knew what he was saying and meant it; and his shame at being hoisted into such high society as theirs rings true. 'I know not how others feel on such occasions, but if anyone happens to praise me, all my faults gush into my face, and make me turn my eyes inward and outward with horror. What am I but a poor old skeleton, tottering towards the grave, and conscious of ten thousand weaknesses, follies, and worse! And for talents, what are mine, but trifling and superficial; and, compared with those of men of real genius, most diminutive! . . . Does it become us, at past threescore each, to be saying fine things to one another? Consider how soon we shall both be nothing!' That is a tone of voice that he does not use in speaking—for his writing voice was a speaking voice—to his friends in the great world.

Again, Cole's High Church and Tory convictions when they touched a very different vein in Walpole sometimes caused explosions. Once or twice the friends almost came to blows over religion. The Church of England had a substantial place in Cole's esteem. But to Walpole, 'Church and presbytery are human

nonsense invented by knaves to govern fools. *Exalted notions of church matters* are contradictions in terms to the lowliness and humility of the gospel. There is nothing sublime but the Divinity. Nothing is sacred but as His work. A tree or a brute stone is more respectacle as such, than a mortal called an archbishop, or an edifice called a church, which are the puny and perishable productions of men. . . . A Gothic church or convent fill one with romantic dreams—but for the mysterious, the Church in the abstract, it is a jargon that means nothing or a great deal too much, and I reject it and its apostles from Athanasius to Bishop Keene.’ Those were outspoken words to a friend who wore a black coat. Yet they were not suffered to break up an intimacy of forty years. Cole, to whom Walpole’s little weaknesses were not unknown, contented himself by commenting sardonically at the end of the letter upon the lowliness and humility of the aristocracy, observed that ‘Mr. Walpole is piqued, I can see, at my reflections on Abbot’s flattery’; but in his reply to Mr. Walpole he referred only to the weather, Mr. Tyson, and the gout.

Horace’s politics were equally detestable to Cole. He was, in writing at least, a red-hot republican, the bitter enemy of all those Tory principles that Cole revered. That, again, was a difference that sometimes raised the temperature of the letters to fever heat—happily for us, for it allows us, reading over their shoulders, to see Horace Walpole roused—the dilettante become a man of action, chafing at his own inactivity ‘sitting with one’s arms folded’ in a chair; deploring his country’s danger; remembering that if Cole is a country clergyman, he is a Walpole; the son of a Prime Minister; that his father’s son might have done more than fill Strawberry Hill with Gothic ornaments; and that his father’s reputation is extremely dear to him. And yet did not gossip whisper that he was not his father’s son, and was there not, somewhere deep within him, an uneasy suspicion that there was a blot on his scutcheon, a freakish strain in his clear Norfolk blood?

Whoever his father may have been, his mother nature had somehow queered the pitch of that very complex human being who was called Horace Walpole. He was not simple; he was not single. As Cole noted with antiquarian particularity, Mr. Wal-

pole's letter of Friday, 21 May, 1762, was sealed with a 'seal of red wax, a cupid with a large mask of a monkey's face. An antique. Oval.' The cupid and the monkey had each set their stamp on Horace Walpole's wax. He was mischievous and obscene; he gibbered and mocked and pelted the holy shrines with nutshells. And yet with what a grace he did it—with what ease and brilliancy and wit! In body, too, he was a contradiction—lean as a grasshopper, yet tough as steel. He was lapped in luxury, yet never wore a great-coat, ate and drank as little as a fasting friar, and walked on wet grass in slippers. He fribbled away his time collecting bric-à-brac and drinking tea with old ladies; yet wrote the best letters in the language in the midst of the chatter; knew everyone; went everywhere; and, as he said, 'lived post'. He seemed sometimes as heartless as a monkey; drove Chatterton, so people said, to suicide, and allowed old Madame du Deffand to die alone in despair. And yet who but Cupid wrote when Gray was dead, 'I treated him insolently; he loved me and I did not think he did'? Or again, 'One loves to find people care for one, when they can have no view in it'? But it is futile to make such contradictions clash. There were a thousand subtler impressions stamped on the wax of Horace Walpole, and it is only posterity, for whom he had a great affection, who will be able, when they have read all that he wrote to Mann and Conway and Gray and the sisters Berry and Madame du Deffand and a score of others; and what they wrote to him; and the innumerable notes at the bottom of the page about cooks and scullions and gardeners and old women in inns—it is only they who will be able, when Mr. Lewis has brought his magnificent work to an end, to say what indeed Horace Walpole was. Meanwhile, we, who only catch a fleeting glimpse and set down hastily what we make of it, can testify that he is the best company in the world—the most amusing, the most intriguing—the strangest mixture of ape and Cupid that ever was.

## The Rev. William Cole<sup>1</sup>

A LETTER

**M**Y dear William,  
In my opinion you are keeping something back. Last year when you went to Paris and did not see Madame du Deffand but measured the exact length of every nose on every tombstone—I can assure you they have grown no longer or shorter since—I was annoyed, I admit. But I had the sense to see that, after all, you were alive, and a clergyman, and from Bletchley—in fact, you were as much out of place in Paris as a cowslip impaled upon the diamond horns of a duchess's tiara. Put him back in Bletchley, I said, plant him in his own soil, let him burble on in his own fashion, and the miracle will happen. The cows will low; the church bells will ring; all Bletchley will come alive; and, reading over William's shoulder, we shall see deep, deep into the hearts of Mrs. Willis and Mr. Robinson.

I regret to tell you that I was wrong. You are not a cowslip. You do not bloom. The hearts of Mrs. Willis and Mr. Robinson remain sealed books to us. You write 16 January 1766, and it is precisely as if I had written 16 January 1932. In other words, you have rubbed all the bloom off two hundred years and that is so rare a feat—it implies something so queer in the writer—that I am intrigued and puzzled and cannot help asking you to enlighten me. Are you simply a bore, William? No, that is out of the question. In the first place, Horace Walpole did not tolerate bores, or write to them, or go for country jaunts with them; in the second, Miss Waddell loves you. You shed all round you, in the eyes of Miss Waddell, that mysterious charm which those we love impart to their meanest belongings. She loves your parrot; she commiserates your cat. Every room in your house is familiar to her. She knows about your Gothic chamber and your neat arched bed; she knows how many steps led up to the pantry and down to the summer-house; she knows, she approves, how you spent every hour of your day. She sees the neighbours through the light of your eyes. She laughs at some; she likes others; she knows who was fat and who was thin, and who told lies, who had

<sup>1</sup> Written in 1932



a bad leg, and who was no better than she should have been. Mr. and Mrs. Barton, Thomas Tansley, Mr. and Mrs. Lord of Mursley, the Diceys, and Dr. Pettingal are all real and alive to her; so are your roses, your horses, your nectarines and your knats.

Would that I could see through her eyes! Alas, wherever I look I see blight and mildew. The moss never grows upon your walls. Your nectarines never ripen. The blackbird sings, but out of tune. The knats—and you say ‘I hardly know a place so pestered with that vermin as Bletchley’—bite, just like our gnats. As for the human beings they pass through the same disenchantment. Not that I have any fault to find with your friends or with Bletchley either. Nobody is very good, but then nobody is very bad. Tom sometimes hits a hare, oftener he misses; the fish sometimes bite, but not always; if it freezes it also thaws, and though the harvest was not bad it might have been better. But now, William, confess. We know in our hearts, you and I, that England in the eighteenth century was not like this. We know from Woodforde, from Walpole, from Thomas Turner, from Skinner, from Gray, from Fielding, from Jane Austen, from scores of memoirs and letters, from a thousand forgotten stonemasons, bricklayers and cabinet-makers, from a myriad sources, that I have not learning to name or space to quote, that England was a substantial, beautiful country in the eighteenth century; aristocratic and common; hand-made and horse-ploughed; an eating, drinking, bastard-begetting, laughing, cursing, humorous, eccentric, lovable land. If with your pen in your hand and the dates facing you, 16 January 1766, you see none of all this, then the fault is yours. Some spite has drawn a veil across your eyes. Indeed, there are pouches under them I could swear. You slouch as you walk. You switch at thistles half-heartedly with your stick. You do not much enjoy your food. Gossip has no relish for you. You mention the ‘scandalous story of Mr. Felton Hervey, his two daughters and a favourite footman’ and add, ‘I hope it is not true.’ So do I, but I cannot put much life into my hoping when you withhold the facts. You stop Pettingal in the middle of his boasting—you cut him short with a sarcasm—just as he was proving that the Greeks liked toasted cheese and was deriving the word Bergamy from the Arabic. As for Madame Geoffrin,

you never lose a chance of saying something disobliging about that lady; a coffee-pot has only to be reputed French for you to defame it. Then look how touchy you are—you grumble, the servants are late with the papers, you complain, Mr. Pitt never thanked you for the pigeons (yet Horace Walpole thought you a philosopher); then how you suspect people's motives; how you bid fathers thrash their little boys; how you are sure the servant steals the onions. All these are marks of a thin-blooded poverty-stricken disposition. And yet—you are a good man; you visit the poor; you bury the infected; you have been educated at Cambridge; you venerate antiquity. The truth is that you are concealing something, even from Miss Waddell.

Why, I ask, did you write this diary and lock it in a chest with iron hoops and insist that no one was to read it or publish it for twenty years after your death unless it were that you had something on your mind, something that you wished to confess and get rid of? You are not one of those people who love life so well that they cherish even the memory of roast mutton, like Woodforde; you did not hate life so much that you must shriek out your curse on it, like poor Skinner. You write and write, rambly, listlessly, like a person who is trying to bring himself to say the thing that will explain to himself what is wrong with himself. And you find it very hard. You would rather mention anything but that—Miss Chester, I mean, and the boat on the Avon. You cannot force yourself to admit that you have kept that lock of hair in your drawer these thirty years. When Mrs. Robinson, her daughter, asked you for it (19 March 1766) you said you could not find it. But you were not easy under that concealment. You did at length go to your private drawer (26 November 1766) and there it was, as you well knew. But even so, with the lock of hair in your hand, you still seek to put us off the scent. You ramble on about giving Mrs. Robinson a barrel of oysters; about potted rabbits; about the weather, until suddenly out it comes, 'Gave Mrs. Robinson a braided lock of Lady Robinson's Mother's hair (and Sister to Mrs. Robinson of Cransley), which I cut off in a Boat on the River Avon at Bath about thirty years ago when my Sister Jane and myself were much acquainted with her, then Miss Chester.' There we have it. The poisoned tooth is out. You were once young and ardent

and very much in love. Passion overcame you. You were alone. The wind blew a lock of Miss Chester's hair from beneath her hat. You reached forward. You cut it. And then? Nothing. That is your tragedy—you yourself failed yourself. You think of that scene twenty times a day, I believe, as you saunter, rather heavily, along the damp paths at Bletchley. That is the dreary little tune that you hum as you stoop over your parments measuring noses, deciphering dates—'I failed, failed, failed on the boat on the Avon'. That is why your nectarines are blighted; and the parrot dies; and the parlour cat is scalded; and you love nobody except, perhaps, your little dun-coloured horse. That is why you 'always had a mind to live retired in Glamorganshire'. That is why Mr. Pitt never thanked you for the pigeons. That is why Mr. Stonehewer became His Majesty's Historiographer, while you visited paupers in Fenny Stratford. That is why he never came to see you, and why you observed so bitterly, that 'people suffer themselves to forget their old friends when they are surrounded by the great and are got above the world'. You see, William, if you hoard a failure, if you come to grudge even the sun for shining—and that, I think, is what you did—fruit does not ripen; a blight falls upon parrots and cats; people would actually rather that you did not give them pigeons.

But enough. I may be wrong. Miss Chester's hair may have nothing to do with it. And Miss Waddell may be right—every good quality of heart and head may be yours. I am sure I hope so. But I beg, William, now that you are about to begin a fresh volume, at Cambridge too, with men of character and learning, that you will pull yourself together. Speak out. Justify the faith that Miss Waddell has in you. For you are keeping one of the finest scholars of her time shut up in the British Museum among mummies and policemen and wet umbrellas. There must be a trifle of ninety-five volumes more of you in those iron-bound chests. Lighten her task; relieve our anxiety, and so add to the gratitude of your obliged obedient servant,

VIRGINIA WOOLF

## White's Selborne<sup>1</sup>

'... there is somewhat in most genera at least, that at first sight discriminates them, and enables a judicious observer to pronounce upon them with some certainty.' Gilbert White is talking, of course, about birds; the good ornithologist, he says, should be able to distinguish them by their air—'on the ground as well as on the wing, and in the bush as well as in the hand'. But when the bird happens to be Gilbert White himself, when we try to discriminate the colour and shape of this very rare fowl, we are at a loss. Is he, like the bird so brightly coloured by hand as a frontispiece to the second volume, a hybrid—something between a hen that clucks and a nightingale that sings? It is one of those ambiguous books that seem to tell a plain story, the *Natural History of Selborne*, and yet by some apparently unconscious device of the author's has a door left open, through which we hear distant sounds, a dog barking, cart-wheels creaking, and see, when 'all the fading landscape sinks in night', if not Venus herself, at least a phantom owl.

His intention seems plain enough—it was to impart certain observations upon the fauna and flora of his native village to his friends Thomas Pennant and Daines Barrington. But it was not for the benefit of those gentlemen that he composed the sober yet stately description of Selborne with which the book opens. There it is before us, the village of Selborne, lying in the extreme eastern corner of the county of Hampshire, with its hanger and its sheep walks and those deep lanes 'that affright the ladies and make timid horsemen shudder'. The soil is part clay, part malm; the cottages are of stone or brick; the men work in the hop-gardens and in the spring and summer the women weed the corn. No novelist could have opened better. Selborne is set solidly in the foreground. But something is lacking; and so before the scene fills with birds, mice, voles, crickets, and the Duke of Richmond's moose, before the page is loud with the chirpings, bleatings, lowings, and gruntings of their familiar intercourse, we have Queen Anne lying on the bank to watch the deer driven past. It

Written in August, 1939

was an anecdote, he casually remarks, that he had from an old keeper, Adams, whose great-grandfather, father and self were all keepers in the forest. And thus the single straggling street is allied with history, and shaded by tradition. No novelist could have given us more briefly and completely all that we need to know before the story begins.

The story of Selborne is a vegetable, an animal story. The gossip is about the habits of vipers and the love interest is supplied chiefly by frogs. Compared with Gilbert White the most realistic of novelists is a rash romantic. The crop of the cuckoo is examined; the viper is dissected; the grasshopper is sought with a pliant grass blade in its hole; the mouse is measured and found to weigh one copper halfpenny. Nothing can exceed the minuteness of these observations, or the scrupulous care with which they are conducted. The chief question in dispute—it is indeed the theme of the book—is the migration of swallows. Barrington believed that the swallow sleeps out the winter; White, who has a nephew in Andalusia to inform him, now inclines to migration; then draws back. Every grain of evidence is sifted; none is obscured. With all his faculties bent on this great question, the image of science at her most innocent and most sincere, he loses that self-consciousness which so often separates us from our fellow-creatures and becomes like a bird seen through a field-glass busy in a distant hedge. This is the moment then, when his eyes are fixed upon the swallow, to watch Gilbert White himself.

We observe in the first place the creature's charming simplicity. He is quite indifferent to public opinion. He will transplant a colony of crickets to his lawn; imprison one in a paper cage on his table; bawl through a speaking trumpet at his bees—they remain indifferent; and arrive at Selborne with Aunt Snooke's aged tortoise seated beside him in the post-chaise. And while thus engaged he emits those little chuckles of delight, those half-conscious burlings and comments which make him as 'amusive' as one of his own birds. ' . . . But their inequality of height', he muses, pondering the abortive match between the moose and the red deer, 'must always have been a bar to any commerce of an amorous kind.' 'The copulation of frogs', he observes, 'is notorious to everybody . . . and yet I never saw, or read, of toads being observed in the same situation.' 'Pitiable seems the condition of

this poor embarrassed reptile', he laments over the tortoise, yet 'there is a season (usually the beginning of June) when the tortoise walks on tip-toe' along the garden path in search of love.

And just as the vicarage garden seemed to Aunt Snooke's tortoise a whole world, so, as we look through the eyes of Gilbert White, England becomes immense. The South Downs, across which he rides year after year, turn to 'a vast range of mountains'. The country is very empty. He is more solitary at Selborne than a peasant to-day in the remotest Hebrides. It is true that he has—he is proud of the fact—a nephew in Andalusia; but he has no acquaintance at present among the gentlemen of the Navy; and though London and Bath exist, of course—London indeed boasts a very fine collection of horns—rumours from those capitals come very slowly across wild moors and roads which the snow has made impassable. In this quiet air sounds are magnified. We hear the whisper of the grasshopper lark; the caw of rooks is like a pack of hounds 'in hollow, echoing woods'; and on a still summer evening the Portsmouth gun booms out just as the goat-sucker begins its song. His mind, like the bird's crop that the farmer's wife found stuffed with vegetables and cooked for her dinner, has nothing but insects in it and tender green shoots. This innocent, this unconscious happiness is conveyed, not by assertion, but much more effectively by those unsought memories that come of their own accord. They are all of hot summer evenings—at Oxford in Christ Church quadrangle; riding from Richmond to Sunbury with the swallows skimming the river. Even the strident voice of the cricket, so discordant to some, fills his mind 'with a train of summer ideas, of everything that is rural, verdurous and joyful'. There is a continuity in his happiness; the same thoughts recur on the same occasions. 'I made the same remark in former years as I came the same way annually.' Year after year he was thinking of the swallows.

But the landscape in which this bird roams so freely has its hedges. They shut in, but they protect. There is what he calls, so aptly, Providence. Church spires, he remarks, 'are very necessary ingredients in the landscape'. Providence dwells there—inscrutable, for why does it allot so many years to Aunt Snooke's tortoise? But all-wise—consider the legs of the frog—'How wonderful is the economy of Providence with regards to the limbs of

so vile an animal!' In another fifty years Providence would have been neither so inscrutable nor as wise—it would have lost its shade. But Providence about 1760 was in its prime; it sets all doubts at rest, and so leaves the mind free to question practically everything. Besides Providence there are the castles and seats of the nobility. He respects them almost equally. The old families—the Howes, the Mordaunts—know their places and keep the poor in theirs. Gilbert White is far less tender to the poor—'We abound with poor', he writes, as if the vermin were beneath his notice—than to the grasshopper whom he lifts out of its hole so carefully and once inadvertently squeezed to death. Finally, shading the landscape with its august laurel, is literature—Latin literature, naturally. His mind is haunted by the classics. He sounds a Latin phrase now and then as if to tune his English. The echo that was so famous a feature of Selborne seems of its own accord to boom out *Tityre, tu patulae recubans* . . . It was with Virgil in his mind that Gilbert White described the women making rush candles at Selborne.

So we observe through our field-glasses this very fine specimen of the eighteenth-century clerical naturalist. But just as we think to have got him named he moves. He sounds a note that is not the characteristic note of the common English clergyman. 'When I hear fine music I am haunted with passages therefrom night and day; and especially at first waking, which by their importunity, give me more uneasiness than pleasure.' Why does music, he asks, 'so strangely affect some men, as it were by recollection, for days after a concert is over?'

It is a question that sends us baffled to his biography. But we learn only what we knew already—that his affection for Kitty Mulso was not passionate; that he was born at Selborne in 1720 and died there in 1793; and that his 'days passed with scarcely any other vicissitudes than those of the seasons'. But one fact is added—a negative, but a revealing fact; there is no portrait of him in existence. He has no face. That is why perhaps he escapes identification. His observation of the insect in the grass is minute; but he also raises his eyes to the horizon and looks and listens. In that moment of abstraction he hears sounds that make him uneasy in the early morning; he escapes from Selborne, from his own age, and comes winging his way to us in the dusk along the

hedgerows. A clerical owl? A parson with the wings of a bird? A hybrid? But his own description fits him best. 'The kestrel or wind-hover', he says, 'has a peculiar mode of hanging in the air in one place, his wings all the time being briskly agitated.'



## A Friend of Johnson<sup>1</sup>

A GREAT book, like a great nature, may have disastrous effects upon other people. It robs them of their character and substitutes its own. No one, for instance, who has read what Carlyle has to say about Lamb ever rids his mind completely of the impression, in spite of the fact that we judge the writer of it far more than his victim. Some deposit remains with us. It is strange to reflect what numbers of men and women live in our minds merely because Boswell took a note of their talk. Two or three such lines have a generating power; a body grows from the seed. The ordinary English reader knows Baretti solely through Johnson. 'His account of Italy', said Johnson, 'is a very entertaining book; and, Sir, I know no man who carries his head higher in conversation than Baretti. There are strong powers in his mind. He has not, indeed, many hooks, but with what hooks he has he grapples very forcibly.' This may be, as Mr. Collison-Morley<sup>2</sup> says, 'a very good summary', and yet his character is scarcely to be summarized thus; his vitality is too great for that. Mr. Collison-Morley, further, has the advantage of knowing the Italian side of the story.

The Barettis came from Piedmont, and Giuseppe boasted romantically of his noble birth. He could not live at home, where they wished to train him for a lawyer, but ran away to see the world. He lived at Milan, Venice, and Turin by his pen, turning out ceremonial verses to order. His qualities, however, were not those that bring success. He was susceptible, but so importunate that a certain Mrs. Paradise had to snub him with boiling water from her tea urn. Great animal vigour and a powerful mind made him insolent and overbearing in manner before his fame authorized it. Thus he took it upon himself as a young writer to denounce Goldoni, the Arcadians, and Italian blank verse, when they were in fashion; later, when archaeology was the rage, he declared that antiquaries should be clapped into lunatic asylums, seeing merely the pedantic side of the pursuit and failing from

<sup>1</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, July 29th, 1909

<sup>2</sup> *Giuseppe Baretti and his Friends*, by Lacy Collison-Morley

some lack of imagination to foretell its future. To succeed in letters needed in that age the utmost tact. Then as now France supplied Italy with her reading to a great extent, for every province had its own dialect; authors were miserably paid, and their manuscripts had to be passed by two censors. Italy afforded no place for a man whose intellect led him to despise mere grace and scholarship, and whose temper urged him to speak out.

He decided to try his fortune in England. He was amazed by London: Lincoln's Inn, he wrote home, was three times the size of St. Mark's Square; 'a great street, hung with painted signs and clamorous with droves of oxen and of sheep, carriages and foot passengers, ran right through the city; the wheels splash you with mud black as ink; there are women of "perfect beauty" mixing with horrid cripples'; Fielding told him that a thousand or even two thousand die every year from want and hunger, 'but London is so large it is hardly noticed'; a din of whips and curses lasts all day long, and at night the watchmen cry the hours hoarsely, 'vile hounds' ring bells as they collect the letters; sweeps, milk-women, oyster-sellers vociferate perpetually. In spite of this London gradually ousted all other places in his affections. To begin with he found that the Italian language was in fashion, for an Italian tour was essential; and the Italian opera was so popular that the audience followed the words by the light of private candles. He could thus keep himself by teaching—one of his pupils being the famous Mrs. Lennox, by whom he was introduced to Johnson. The merits of the society which Johnson ruled were precisely to the taste of Baretti. He loved to stretch his legs, to talk enormously, to mix with men of all callings, to ramble the streets at night with a companion, and the booksellers with their vast and indiscriminate greed for copy suited his powers admirably. His mind, we know, had strong hooks, and having set himself to learn English he made extraordinary progress in 'that strange and most irregular tongue'. He could speak street slang even, and soon could carry on a controversy in vigorous English prose. It is typical of him that he could acquire any living language with enthusiasm, but the dead languages bored him. He turned out dictionaries, and translations and travels, with the printer's devil waiting at the door, until a lump grew on his finger where the pen rested. His struggle to live by his brains is, for us,

full of picturesque adventures. A dissertation upon the Italian poets introduced him to a wealthy English gentleman who had been engaged on a translation of Ariosto for twenty years. For the sake of Baretti's advice and conversation he offered him a house and garden in his park, a gold watch worth forty guineas, and a wife. But the friendship ended in bitterness; it was said that the watch was only lent. Whether it was that Baretti had a drop of hot Southern blood in him, or whether the society of scholars was in truth a rough and hasty world, we certainly find matter, even in a slight memoir like the present, for comparisons between that age and this. One cannot imagine, for instance, that writers then retired to their studies or worked by the clock. They seem to have learnt by talk; their friendships thus were important and outspoken. Conversation was a kind of strife, and the jealousies and contradictions which attended the display gave it at least an eager excitement. Goldsmith found Baretti 'insolent and overbearing', Baretti thought Goldsmith 'an unpolished man, and an absurd companion'. Mrs. Lennox, having complained that Baretti paid more attention to her child than to herself, he retorted: 'You are a child in stature and a child in understanding', being generally provoking, where opportunity offered. Indeed a society of clever people whose witticisms, jealousies, and emotions circulate is much like a society of children. Reticence and ceremony seem to mark middle age.

The life of Baretti reminds us, too, in a singular way of the rudeness that lay outside the coffee-houses and the clubs. One afternoon in October, 1769, he walked from Soho to the Orange coffee-house in the Haymarket. On his way back a woman sitting on a doorstep jumped up and struck him. In the darkness he returned the blow, whereupon three bullies set upon him, and he was chased along Oxenden Street, shouting 'Murder' with a crowd at his heels, who reviled him for a Frenchman. One man made dashes for his pigtail, and to save himself Baretti drew a silver-bladed fruit knife, and stabbed him twice. As the only means of escape, for he was stout, near-sighted, and the road swam with puddles, he burst into a shop and gave himself up to the police. Goldsmith, we notice, drove with him to the prison and offered him 'every shilling' in his purse. The man died from the blow; Baretti was acquitted, and the fruit knife used to be shown at

dessert. The same kind of roughness marks the famous friendship with the Thrales, of which Mr. Collison-Morley gives a very lively account. He lived in the family, not as a regular tutor with a salary, but as a hired friend who must talk in return for board and lodging, and might hope for an occasional present. The good-natured Mrs. Thrale stood it for nearly three years, and then, finding him intolerable with his airs and arrogances, treated him 'with some coldness'; whereupon he set down his dish of tea, 'not half drank', went 'for my hat and stick that lay in the corner of the room', and walked off to London without saying goodbye. Johnson pleaded for him. 'Forgive him, dearest lady, the rather because of his misbehaviour; I am afraid he has learned part of me.' It was true, no doubt, that he traded upon a certain likeness to the doctor, and expected the same consideration, but he learnt much from him that was wholly admirable. When he went back to Italy in 1763 he found that the old abuses at which he had tilted as a boy were still rampant. He decided to bring out a review, on the model of the *Rambler*, in which he could lash the Arcadians freely. In the person of Aristarco he delivered himself of his views upon the state of Italian literature, upon blank verse, Goldoni and the antiquaries, retailing at the same time some of Johnson's peculiarities—that the Scotch are inferior, and that Milton is sometimes dull. Nevertheless, his satire told, and his controversies raised such an outcry that the *Frusta letteraria* was suspended. But 'no such criticism had as yet appeared in Italy' and it is today a classic among his countrymen. But he 'could not enjoy his own country'. England rewarded him with a Secretaryship at the Royal Academy, and added a pension in his later years. For, industrious as he was, and in receipt sometimes of huge profits, his earnings never stuck to him. A strange kind of clumsiness united to a passionate nature seemed to make a child of him. What, for instance, could be more childish than the quarrel with Johnson as to whether Omai, an Otaheitan, had beaten him at chess or not? 'Do you think I should be conquered at chess by a savage?' 'I know you were', says Johnson. The two men, who respected each other, parted and never met again. English people now scarcely read his books, unless it be the Italian dictionary, but his life is worth reading, because he exhibits so curious a mixture of power and weakness; he is in many ways so

true a type of the man who lived by his pen in the eighteenth century; and Mr. Collison-Morley fills in the old story as Boswell and Mrs. Thrale told it with new matter from Italian sources. His life was full and vigorous; as for his works, he wished that every page lay at the bottom of the sea.

## Dr. Burney's Evening Party

### I

THE party was given either in 1777 or in 1778; on which day or month of the year is not known, but the night was cold. Fanny Burney, from whom we get much of our information, was accordingly either twenty-five or twenty-six, as we choose. But in order to enjoy the party to the full it is necessary to go back some years and to scrape acquaintance with the guests.

Fanny, from the earliest days, had always been fond of writing. There was a cabin at the end of her stepmother's garden at King's Lynn, where she used to sit and write of an afternoon till the oaths of the seamen sailing up and down the river drove her in. But it was only in the afternoon and in remote places that her half-suppressed, uneasy passion for writing had its way. Writing was held to be slightly ridiculous in a girl; rather unseemly in a woman. Besides, one never knew, if a girl kept a diary, whether she might not say something indiscreet—so Miss Dolly Young warned her; and Miss Dolly Young, though exceedingly plain, was esteemed a woman of the highest character in King's Lynn. Fanny's stepmother also disapproved of writing. Yet so keen was the joy—"I cannot express the pleasure I have in writing down my thoughts at the very moment, and my opinion of people when I first see them"—that scribble she must. Loose sheets of paper fell from her pocket and were picked up and read by her father to her agony and shame; once she was forced to make a bonfire of all her papers in the back garden. At last some kind of compromise seems to have been arrived at. The morning was sacred to serious tasks like sewing; it was only in the afternoon that she allowed herself to scribble—letters, diaries, stories, verses in the look-out place which overhung the river, till the oaths of the sailors drove her in.

There was something strange in that, perhaps, for the eighteenth century was the age of oaths. Fanny's early diary is larded with them. 'God help me', 'Split me', 'Stap my vitals', together with damns and devilishes, dropped daily and hourly from the lips of her adored father and her venerated Daddy Crisp. Perhaps

Fanny's attitude to language was altogether a little abnormal. She was immensely susceptible to the power of words, but not nervously or acutely as Jane Austen was. She adored fluency and the sound of the language pouring warmly and copiously over the printed page. Directly she read *Rasselas*, enlarged and swollen sentences formed on the tip of her childish pen in the manner of Dr. Johnson. Quite early in life she would go out of her way to avoid the plain name of Tomkins. Thus, whatever she heard from her cabin at the end of the garden was sure to affect her more than most girls, and it is also clear that while her ears were sensitive to sound, her soul was sensitive to meaning. There was something a little prudish in her nature. Just as she avoided the name of Tomkins, so she avoided the roughnesses, the asperities, the plainnesses of daily life. The chief fault that mars the extreme vivacity and vividness of the early diary is that the profusion of words tends to soften the edges of the sentences, and the sweetness of the sentiment to smooth out the outlines of the thought. Thus, when she heard the sailors swearing, though Maria Allen, her half-sister, would, one believes, have liked to stay and toss a kiss over the water—her future history allows us to take the liberty of thinking so—Fanny went indoors.

Fanny went indoors, but not to solitary meditation. The house, whether it was in Lynn or in London—and by far the greater part of the year was spent in Poland Street—hummed with activity. There was the sound of the harpsichord; the sound of singing; there was the sound—for such concentration seems to pervade a whole house with its murmur—of Dr. Burney writing furiously, surrounded by notebooks, in his study; and there were great bursts of chatter and laughter when, returning from their various occupations, the Burney children met together. Nobody enjoyed family life more than Fanny did. For there her shyness only served to fasten the nickname of Old Lady upon her; there she had a familiar audience for her humour; there she need not bother about her clothes; there—perhaps the fact that their mother had died when they were all young was partly the cause of it—was that intimacy which expresses itself in jokes and legends and a private language ('The wig is wet', they would say, winking at each other); there were endless confabulations, and confidences between sisters and brothers and brothers and sisters. Nor could there be any

doubt that the Burneys—Susan and James and Charles and Fanny and Hetty and Charlotte—were a gifted race. Charles was a scholar; James was a humorist; Fanny was a writer; Susan was musical—each had some special gift or characteristic to add to the common stock. And besides their natural gifts they were happy in the fact that their father was a very popular man; a man, too, so admirably situated by his talents, which were social, and his birth, which was gentle, that they could mix without difficulty either with lords or with bookbinders, and had, in fact, as free a run of life as could be wished.

As for Dr. Burney himself, there are some points about which, at this distance of time, one may feel dubious. It is difficult to be sure what, had one met him now, one would have felt for him. One thing is certain—one would have met him everywhere. Hostesses would be competing to catch him. Notes would wait for him. Telephone bells would interrupt him. For he was the most sought-after, the most occupied of men. He was always dashing in and dashing out. Sometimes he dined off a box of sandwiches in his carriage. Sometimes he went out at seven in the morning, and was not back from his round of music lessons till eleven at night. The 'habitual softness of his manners', his great social charm, endeared him to everybody. His haphazard untidy ways—everything, notes, money, manuscripts, was tossed into a drawer, and he was robbed of all his savings once, but his friends were delighted to make it up for him; his odd adventures—did he not fall asleep after a bad crossing at Dover, and so return to France and so have to cross the Channel again?—gave him a claim upon people's kindness and sympathy. It is, perhaps, his diffuseness that makes him a trifle nebulous. He seems to be for ever writing and then rewriting, and requiring his daughters to write for him, endless books and articles, while over him, unchecked, unfiled, unread perhaps, pour down notes, letters, invitations to dinner which he cannot destroy and means some day to annotate and collect, until he seems to melt away at last in a cloud of words. When he died at the age of eighty-eight, there was nothing to be done by the most devoted of daughters but to burn the whole accumulation entire. Even Fanny's love of language was suffocated. But if we fumble a little as to our feeling for Dr. Burney, Fanny certainly did not. She adored her father. She never minded how many



times she had to lay aside her own writing in order to copy out his. And he returned her affection. Though his ambition for her success at Court was foolish, perhaps, and almost cost her her life, she had only to cry when a distasteful suitor was pressed on her, 'Oh, Sir, I wish for nothing! Only let me live with you!' for the emotional doctor to reply, 'My Life! Thou shalt live with me for ever if thou wilt. Thou canst not think I meant to get rid of thee?' And not only were his eyes full of tears, but, what was more remarkable, he never mentioned Mr. Barlow again. Indeed, the Burneys were a happy family; a mixed composite, oddly assorted family; for there were the Allens, too, and little half-brothers and half-sisters were being born and growing up.

So time passed, and the passage of the years made it impossible for the family to continue in Poland Street any longer. First they moved to Queen Square, and then, in 1774, to the house where Newton had lived, in St. Martin's Street, Leicester Fields; where his Observatory still stood, and his room with the painted panels was still to be seen. Here in a mean street, but in the centre of the town, the Burneys set up their establishment. Here Fanny went on scribbling, stealing to the Observatory as she had stolen to the cabin at Lynn, for she exclaimed, 'I cannot any longer resist what I find to be irresistible, the pleasure of popping down my thoughts from time to time upon paper'. Here came so many famous people either to be closeted with the doctor, or, like Garrick, to sit with him while his fine head of natural hair was brushed, or to join the lively family dinner, or, more formally, to gather together in a musical party, where all the Burney children played and their father 'dashed away' on the harpsichord, and perhaps some foreign musician of distinction performed a solo—so many people came for one reason or another to the house in St. Martin's Street that it is only the eccentrics, the grotesques, that catch the eye. One remembers, for instance, the Ajujari, the astonishing soprano, because she had been 'mauled as an infant by a pig, in consequence of which she is reported to have a silver side'. One remembers Bruce, the traveller, because he had a

most extraordinary complaint. When he attempted to speak, his whole stomach suddenly seemed to heave like an organ bellows. He did not wish to make any secret about it, but spoke of it as having originated in Abyssinia. However, one evening,

when he appeared rather agitated, it lasted much longer than usual, and was so violent that it alarmed the company.

One seems to remember, for she paints herself while she paints the others, Fanny herself slipping eagerly and lightly in and out of all this company, with her rather prominent gnat-like eyes, and her shy, awkward manners. But the gnat-like eyes, the awkward manners, concealed the quickest observation, the most retentive memory. As soon as the company had gone, she stole to the Observatory and wrote down every word, every scene, in letters twelve pages long, for her beloved Daddy Crisp at Chessington. That old hermit—he had retired to a house in a field in dudgeon with society—though professing to be better pleased with a bottle of wine in his cellar and a horse in his stable, and a game of backgammon at night, than with all the fine company in the world, was always agog for news. He scolded his Fannikin if she did not tell him all about her fine goings-on. And he scolded her again if she did not write at full tilt exactly as the words came into her head.

Mr. Crisp wanted to know in particular 'about Mr. Greville and his notions'. For, indeed, Mr. Greville was a perpetual source of curiosity. It is a thousand pities that time with her poppy dust has covered Mr. Greville so that only his most prominent features, his birth, his person, and his nose emerge. Fulke Greville was the descendant—he must, one fancies, have emphasized the fact from the way in which it is repeated—of the friend of Sir Philip Sidney. A coronet, indeed, 'hung almost suspended over his head'. In person he was tall and well proportioned. 'His face, features, and complexion were striking for masculine beauty.' 'His air and carriage were noble with conscious dignity'; his bearing was 'lofty, yet graceful'. But all these gifts and qualities, to which one must add that he rode and fenced and danced and played tennis to admiration, were marred by prodigious faults. He was supercilious in the extreme; he was selfish; he was fickle. He was a man of violent temper. His introduction to Dr. Burney in the first place was due to his doubt whether a musician could be fit company for a gentleman. When he found that young Burney not only played the harpsichord to perfection, but curved his finger and rounded his hand as he played; that he answered plain 'Yes, Sir,' or 'No, Sir,' being more interested in the music than in his patron; that

it was only indeed when Greville himself thrummed pertinaciously from memory that he could stand it no longer, and broke into vivacious conversation—it was only when he found that young Burney was both gifted and well bred that, being himself a very clever man, he no longer stood upon his dignity. Burney became his friend and his equal. Burney, indeed, almost became his victim. For if there was one thing that the descendant of the friend of Sir Philip Sidney detested it was what he called 'fogrum'. By that expressive word he seems to have meant the middle-class virtues of discretion and respectability, as opposed to the aristocratic virtues of what he called '*ton*'. Life must be lived dashingly, daringly, with perpetual display, even if the display was extremely expensive, and, as seemed possible to those who trailed dismally round his grounds praising the improvements, as boring to the man who made it as to the unfortunate guests whose admiration he insisted upon extorting. But Greville could not endure fogrum in himself or in his friends. He threw the obscure young musician into the fast life of White's and Newmarket, and watched with amusement to see if he sank or swam. Burney, most adroit of men, swam as if born to the water, and the descendant of the friend of Sir Philip Sidney was pleased. From being his protégé, Burney became his confidant. Indeed, the splendid gentleman, for all his high carriage, was in need of one. For Greville, could one wipe away the poppy dust that covers him, was one of those tortured and unhappy souls who find themselves torn asunder by opposite desires. On the one hand he was consumed with the wish to be in the first flight of fashion and to do 'the thing', however costly or dreary 'the thing' might be. On the other hand, he was secretly persuaded that 'the proper bent of his mind and understanding was for metaphysics'. Burney, perhaps, was a link between the world of *ton* and the world of fogrum. He was a man of breeding who could dice and bet with the bloods; he was also a musician who could talk of intellectual things and ask clever people to his house.

Thus Greville treated the Burneys as his equals, and came to their house, though his visits were often interrupted by the violent quarrels which he managed to pick even with the amiable Dr. Burney himself. Indeed, as time went on there was nobody with whom Greville did not quarrel. He had lost heavily at the gambling-

tables. His prestige in society was sunk. His habits were driving his family from him. Even his wife, by nature gentle and conciliatory, though excessive thinness made her seem fitted to sit for a portrait 'of a penetrating, puissant and sarcastic fairy queen', was wearied by his infidelities. Inspired by them she had suddenly produced that famous Ode to Indifference, 'which had passed into every collection of fugitive pieces in the English language' and (it is Madam D'Arblay who speaks) 'twined around her brow a garland of wide-spreading and unfading fragrance'. Her fame, it may be, was another thorn in her husband's side; for he, too, was an author. He himself had produced a volume of *Maxims and Characters*; and having 'waited for fame with dignity rather than anxiety, because with expectation unclogged with doubt', was beginning perhaps to become a little impatient when fame delayed. Meanwhile he was fond of the society of clever people, and it was largely at his desire that the famous party in St. Martin's Street met together that very cold night.

## II

In those days, when London was so small, it was easier than now for people to stand on an eminence which they scarcely struggled to keep, but enjoyed by unanimous consent. Everybody knew and remembered when they saw her that Mrs. Greville had written an Ode to Indifference; everybody knew that Mr. Bruce had travelled in Abyssinia; so, too, everybody knew that there was a house at Streatham presided over by a lady called Mrs. Thrale. Without troubling to write an Ode, without hazarding her life among savages, without possessing either high rank or vast wealth, Mrs. Thrale was a celebrity. By the exercise of powers difficult to define—for to feel them one must have sat at table and noticed a thousand audacities and deftnesses and skilful combinations which die with the moment—Mrs. Thrale had the reputation of a great hostess. Her fame spread far beyond her house. People who had never seen her discussed her. People wanted to know what she was like; whether she was really so witty and so well read; whether it was a pose; whether she had a heart; whether she loved her husband the brewer, who seemed a dull dog; why she had married him; whether Dr. Johnson was in love

with her—what, in short, was the truth of her story, the secret of her power. For power she had—that was indisputable.

Even then, perhaps, it would have been difficult to say in what it consisted. For she possessed the one quality which can never be named; she enjoyed the one gift which never ceases to excite discussion. Somehow or other she was a personality. The young Burneys, for instance, had never seen Mrs. Thrale or been to Streatham, but the stir which she set going round her had reached them in St. Martin's Street. When their father came back from giving his first music lesson to Miss Thrale at Streatham they flocked about him to hear his account of her mother. Was she as brilliant as people made out? Was she kind? Was she cruel? Had he liked her? Dr. Burney was in high good temper—in itself a proof of his hostess's power—and he replied, not, we may be sure, as Fanny rendered it, that she was a 'star of the first constellation of female wits: surpassing, rather than equalizing the reputation which her extraordinary endowments, and the splendid fortune which made them conspicuous, had blazoned abroad'—that was written when Fanny's style was old and tarnished, and its leaves were fluttering and falling profusely to the ground; the doctor, we may suppose, answered briskly that he had enjoyed himself hugely; that the lady was a very clever lady; that she had interrupted the lesson all the time; that she had a very sharp tongue—there was no doubt of that; but he would go to the stake for it that she was a good-hearted woman at bottom. Then they must have pressed to know what she looked like. She looked younger than her age—which was about forty. She was rather plump, very small, fair with very blue eyes, and had a scar or cut on her lip. She painted her cheeks, which was unnecessary, because her complexion was rosy by nature. The whole impression she made was one of bustle and gaiety and good temper. She was, he said, a woman 'full of sport', whom nobody could have taken for a creature that the doctor could not bear, a learned lady. Less obviously, she was very observant, as her anecdotes were to prove; capable of passion, though that was not yet visible at Streatham; and, while curiously careless and good-tempered about her dues as a wit or a blue-stockings, had an amusing pride in being descended from a long line of Welsh gentry (whereas the Thrales were obscure), and drew satisfaction now and then from

the reflection that in her veins ran the blood, as the College of Heralds acknowledged, of Adam of Salzburg.

Many women might have possessed these qualities without being remembered for them. Mrs. Thrale possessed besides one that has given her immortality: the power of being the friend of Dr. Johnson. Without that addition, her life might have fizzled and flamed to extinction, leaving nothing behind it. But the combination of Dr. Johnson and Mrs. Thrale created something as solid, as lasting, as remarkable in its way as a work of art. And this was an achievement that called for much rarer powers on the part of Mrs. Thrale than the qualities of a good hostess. When the Thrales first met Johnson he was in a state of profound gloom, crying out such lost and terrible words that Mr. Thrale put his hand before his mouth to silence him. Physically, too, he was afflicted with asthma and dropsy; his manners were rough; his habits were gross; his clothes were dirty; his wig was singed; his linen was soiled; and he was the rudest of men. Yet Mrs. Thrale carried this monster off with her to Brighton and then domesticated him in her house at Streatham, where he was given a room to himself, and where he spent habitually some days in the middle of every week. This might have been, it is true, but the enthusiasm of a curiosity-hunter, ready to put up with a host of disagreeables for the sake of having at her house the original Dr. Johnson, whom anybody in England would gladly pay to see. But it is clear that her connoisseurship was of a finer type. She understood—her anecdotes prove it—that Dr. Johnson was somehow a rare, an important, an impressive human being whose friendship might be a burden but was certainly an honour. And it was not by any means so easy to know this then as it is now. What one knew then was that Dr. Johnson was coming to dinner. And when Dr. Johnson came to dinner one had to ask one's self who was coming too? For if it was a Cambridge man there might be an outburst. If it was a Whig there would certainly be a scene. If it was a Scotsman anything might happen. Such were his whims and prejudices. Next one would have to bethink one, what food had been ordered for dinner? For the food never went uncriticized; and even when one had provided him with young peas from the garden, one must not praise them. Were not the young peas charming? Mrs. Thrale asked once, and he turned upon her,

after gobbling down masses of pork-and-veal pie with lumps of sugar in it, and snapped, 'Perhaps they would be so—to a pig.' Then what would the talk be about—that was another cause for anxiety. If it got upon painting or music he was apt to dismiss it with scorn, for both arts were indifferent to him. Then if a traveller told a tale he was sure to pooh-pooh it, because he believed nothing that he had not seen himself. Then if anyone were to express sympathy in his presence it might well draw down upon one a rebuke for insincerity.

When, one day, I lamented the loss of a cousin killed in America: 'Prithee, my dear,' said he, 'have done with canting. how would the world be the worse for it, I may ask, if all your relations were at once spitted like larks, and roasted for Presto's supper?'

In short, the meal would be strewn with difficulties: the whole affair might run upon the rocks at any moment.

Had Mrs. Thrale been a shallow curiosity-hunter she would have shown him for a season or so and then let him drop. But Mrs. Thrale realized even at the moment that one must submit to be snubbed and bullied and irritated and offended by Dr. Johnson because—well, what was the force that sent an impudent and arrogant young man like Boswell slinking back to his chair like a beaten boy when Johnson bade him? Why did she herself sit up till four in the morning pouring out tea for him? There was a force in him that awed even a competent woman of the world, that subdued even a thick-skinned, conceited boy. He had a right to scold Mrs. Thrale for inhumanity, when she knew that he spent only seventy pounds a year on himself and with the rest of his income supported a houseful of decrepit and ungrateful lodgers. If he gobbled at table and tore the peaches from the wall, he went back punctually to London to see that his wretched inmates had their three good meals over the week-end. Moreover, he was a warehouse of knowledge. If the dancing-master talked about dancing, Johnson could out-talk him. He could keep one amused by the hour with his tales of the underworld, of the toppers and scallywags who haunted his lodgings and claimed his bounty. He said things casually that one never forgot. But what was perhaps more engaging than all this learning and virtue, was his love of pleasure, his detestation of the mere bookworm, his passion for

life and society. And then, as a woman would, Mrs. Thrale loved him for his courage—that he had separated two fierce dogs that were tearing each other to pieces in Mr. Beauclerc's sitting-room; that he had thrown a man, chair and all, into the pit of a theatre; that, blind and twitching as he was, he rode to hounds on Brightelmstone Downs, and followed the hunt as if he had been a gay dog instead of a huge and melancholy old man. Moreover, there was a natural affinity between them. She drew him out: she made him say what without her he would never have said; indeed, he had confessed to her some painful secret of his youth which she never revealed to anybody. Above all, they shared the same passion. Of talk they could neither of them ever have enough.

Thus Mrs. Thrale could always be counted on to produce Dr. Johnson; and it was, of course, Dr. Johnson whom Mr. Greville most particularly wished to meet. As it happened, Dr. Burney had renewed his acquaintance with Dr. Johnson after many years, when he went to Streatham to give his first music lesson, and Dr. Johnson had been there, 'wearing his mildest aspect'. For he remembered Dr. Burney with kindness. He remembered a letter that Dr. Burney had written to him in praise of the dictionary; he remembered, too, that Dr. Burney having called upon him, years ago, and found him out, had dared to cut some bristles from the hearth broom to send to an admirer. When he met Dr. Burney again at Streatham, he had instantly taken a liking to him; soon he was brought by Mrs. Thrale to see Dr. Burney's books; it was quite easy, therefore, for Dr. Burney to arrange that on a certain night in the early spring of 1777 or 1778, Mr. Greville's great wish to meet Dr. Johnson and Mrs. Thrale should be gratified. A day was fixed and the engagement was made.

Whatever the day was it must have been marked in the host's calendar with a note of interrogation. Anything might happen. Any extreme of splendour or disaster might spring from the meeting of so many marked and distinguished characters. Dr. Johnson was formidable. Mr. Greville was domineering. Mrs. Greville was a celebrity in one way; Mrs. Thrale was a celebrity in another. Then it was an occasion. Everybody felt it to be so. Wits would be on the strain; expectation on tiptoe. Dr. Burney foresaw these difficulties and took steps to avert them, but there was, one vaguely feels, something a little obtuse about Dr. Burney.



The eager, kind, busy man, with his head full of music and his desk stuffed with notes, lacked discrimination. The precise outline of people's characters was covered with a rambling pink haze. To his innocent mind music was the universal specific. Everybody must share his own enthusiasm for music. If there was going to be any difficulty, music could solve it. He therefore asked Signor Piozzi to be of the party.

The night arrived and the fire was lit. The chairs were placed and the company arrived. As Dr. Burney had foreseen, the awkwardness was great. Things indeed seemed to go wrong from the start. Dr. Johnson had come in his worsted wig, very clean and prepared evidently for enjoyment. But after one look at him, Mr. Greville seemed to decide that there was something formidable about the old man; it would be better not to compete; it would be better to play the fine gentleman, and leave it to literature to make the first advances. Murmuring, apparently, something about having the toothache, Mr. Greville 'assumed his most supercilious air of distant superiority and planted himself, immovable as a noble statue, upon the hearth'. He said nothing. Then Mrs. Greville, though longing to distinguish herself, judged it proper for Dr. Johnson to begin, so that she said nothing. Mrs. Thrale, who might have been expected to break up the solemnity, felt, it seemed, that the party was not her party and, waiting for the principals to engage, resolved to say nothing either. Mrs. Crewe, the Grevilles' daughter, lovely and vivacious as she was, had come to be entertained and instructed and therefore very naturally she, too, said nothing. Nobody said anything. Complete silence reigned. Here was the very moment for which Dr. Burney in his wisdom had prepared. He nodded to Signor Piozzi; and Signor Piozzi stepped to the instrument and began to sing. Accompanying himself on the pianoforte, he sang an *aria parlante*. He sang beautifully, he sang his best. But far from breaking the awkwardness and loosing the tongues, the music increased the constraint. Nobody spoke. Everybody waited for Dr. Johnson to begin. There, indeed, they showed their fatal ignorance, for if there was one thing that Dr. Johnson never did, it was to begin. Somebody had always to start a topic before he consented to pursue it or to demolish it. Now he waited in silence to be challenged. But he waited in vain. Nobody spoke. Nobody dared

speak. The roulades of Signor Piozzi continued uninterrupted. As he saw his chance of a pleasant evening's talk drowned in the rattle of a piano, Dr. Johnson sank into silent abstraction and sat with his back to the piano gazing at the fire. The *aria parlante* continued uninterrupted. At last the strain became unendurable. At last Mrs. Thrale could stand it no longer. It was the attitude of Mr. Greville, apparently, that roused her resentment. There he stood on the hearth in front of the fire 'staring around him at the whole company in curious silence sardonically'. What right had he, even if he were the descendant of the friend of Sir Philip Sidney, to despise the company and absorb the fire? Her own pride of ancestry suddenly asserted itself. Did not the blood of Adam of Salzburg run in her veins? Was it not as blue as that of the Grevilles and far more sparkling? Giving rein to the spirit of recklessness which sometimes bubbled in her, she rose, and stole on tiptoe to the pianoforte. Signor Piozzi was still singing and accompanying himself dramatically as he sang. She began a ludicrous mimicry of his gestures: she shrugged her shoulders, she cast up her eyes, she reclined her head on one side just as he did. At this singular display the company began to titter—indeed, it was a scene that was to be described 'from coterie to coterie throughout London, with comments and sarcasms of endless variety'. People who saw Mrs. Thrale at her mockery that night never forgot that this was the beginning of that criminal affair, the first scene of that 'most extraordinary drama' which lost Mrs. Thrale the respect of friends and children, which drove her in ignominy from England, and scarcely allowed her to show herself in London again—this was the beginning of her most reprehensible, her most unnatural passion for one who was not only a musician but a foreigner. But all this still lay on the laps of the gods. Nobody yet knew of what iniquity the vivacious lady was capable. She was still the respected wife of a wealthy brewer. Happily, Dr. Johnson was staring at the fire, and knew nothing of the scene at the piano. But Dr. Burney put a stop to the laughter instantly. He was shocked that a guest, even if a foreigner and a musician, should be ridiculed behind his back, and stealing to Mrs. Thrale he whispered kindly but with authority in her ear that if she had no taste for music herself she should consider the feelings of those who had. Mrs. Thrale took the rebuke with admirable sweetness, nodded her acquiescence

and returned to her chair. But she had done her part. After that nothing more could be expected from her. Let them now do what they chose—she washed her hands of it, and seated herself 'like a pretty little Miss', as she said afterwards, to endure what yet remained to be endured 'of one of the most humdrum evenings that she had ever passed'.

If no one had dared to tackle Dr. Johnson in the beginning, it was scarcely likely that they would dare now. He had apparently decided that the evening was a failure so far as talk was concerned. If he had not come dressed in his best clothes he might have had a book in his pocket which he could have pulled out and read. As it was, nothing but the resources of his own mind were left him; but these were huge; and these he explored as he sat with his back to the piano looking the very image of gravity, dignity, and composure.

At last the *aria parlante* came to an end. Signor Piozzi indeed, finding nobody to talk to, fell asleep in his solitude. Even Dr. Burney by this time must have been aware that music is not an infallible specific; but there was nothing for it now. Since people would not talk, the music must continue. He called upon his daughters to sing a duet. And then, when that was over, there was nothing for it but that they must sing another. Signor Piozzi still slept, or still feigned sleep. Dr. Johnson explored still further the magnificent resources of his own mind. Mr. Greville still stood superciliously upon the hearth-rug. And the night was cold.

But it was a grave mistake to suppose that because Dr. Johnson was apparently lost in thought, and certainly almost blind, he was not aware of anything, particularly of anything reprehensible, that was taking place in the room. His 'starts of vision' were always astonishing and almost always painful. So it was on the present occasion. He suddenly woke up. He suddenly roused himself. He suddenly uttered the words for which the company had been waiting all the evening.

'If it were not for depriving the ladies of the fire,' he said, looking fixedly at Mr. Greville, 'I should like to stand upon the hearth myself!' The effect of the outburst was prodigious. The Burney children said afterwards that it was as good as a comedy. The descendant of the friend of Sir Philip Sidney quailed before the Doctor's glance. All the blood of all the Brookes rallied itself

to overcome the insult. The son of a bookseller should be taught his place. Greville did his best to smile—a faint, scoffing smile. He did his best to stand where he had stood the whole evening. He stood smiling, he stood trying to smile, for two or perhaps for three minutes more. But when he looked round the room and saw all eyes cast down, all faces twitching with amusement, all sympathies plainly on the side of the bookseller's son, he could stand there no longer. Fulke Greville slunk away, sloping even his proud shoulders, to a chair. But as he went, he rang the bell 'with force'. He demanded his carriage.

'The party then broke up; and no one from amongst it ever asked, or wished for its repetition.'

## Fanny Burney's Half-sister<sup>1</sup>

SINCE a copy of *Evelina* was lately sold for the enormous sum of four thousand pounds; since the Clarendon Press has lately bestowed the magnificent compliment of a new edition upon *Evelina*; since Maria Allen was the half-sister of the authoress of *Evelina*; since the story of *Evelina* owed much to the story of Maria Allen, it may not be impertinent to consider what is still to be collected of the history of that misguided and unfortunate girl.

As is well known, Dr. Burney was twice married. He took for his second wife a Mrs. Allen of Lynn, the widow of a substantial citizen who left her with a fortune which she promptly lost, and with three children, of whom one, Maria, was almost the same age as Fanny Burney when Dr. Burney's second marriage made them half-sisters. And half-sisters they might have remained with none but a formal tie between them, had not the differences between the two families brought about a much closer relationship. The Burneys were the gifted children of gifted parents. They had enjoyed all the stimulus that comes from running in and out of rooms where grown-up people are talking about books and music, where the piano is always open, and somebody—it may be David Garrick, it may be Mrs. Thrale—is always dropping in to dinner. Maria, on the other hand, had been bred in the provinces. The great figures of Lynn were well known to her, but the great figures of Lynn were merely Miss Dolly Young—who was so ugly—or Mr. Richard Warren, who was so handsome. The talk she heard was the talk of squires and merchants. Her greatest excitement was a dance at the Assembly Rooms or a scandal in the town.

Thus she was rustic and unsophisticated where the Burneys were metropolitan and cultivated. But she was bold and dashing where they were timid and reserved. She was all agog for life and adventure where they were always running away in agonies of shyness to commit their innumerable observations to reams of paper. Unrefined, but generous and unaffected, she brought to Poland Street that whiff of fresh air, that contact with ordinary life and ease in the presence of ordinary things, which the precocious

<sup>1</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, August 28th, 1930

family lacked themselves and found most refreshing in others. Sometimes she visited them in London; sometimes they stayed with her at Lynn. Soon she came to feel for them all, but for Fanny in particular, a warm, a genuine, a surprised admiration. They were so learned and so innocent; they knew so many things, and yet they did not know half as much about life as she did. It was to them, naturally, that she confided her own peccadilloes and adventures, wishing perhaps for counsel, wishing perhaps to impress. Fanny was one of those shy people—'I am not near so squeamish as you are', Maria observed—who draw out the confidences of their bolder friends and delight in accounts of actions which they could not possibly commit themselves. Thus in 1770 Fanny was imparting to her diary certain confidences that Maria had made her of such a nature that when she read the book later she judged it best to tear out twelve pages and burn them. Happily, a packet of letters survives which, though rather meagrely doled out by an editor in the eighties, who thought them too full of dashes to be worthy of the dignity of print, allow us to guess pretty clearly what kind of secret Maria confided and Fanny recorded, and Fanny, grown mature, then tore up.

For example, there was an Assembly at Lynn some time in 1770 to which Maria did not want to go. Bet Dickens, however, overcame her scruples, and she went. However, she was determined not to dance. However, she did dance. Martin was there. She broke her earring. She danced a *minuet à quatre*. She got into the chariot to come home. She came home. 'Was I alone?—guess—well, all is vanity and vexations of spirit.' It needs little ingenuity to interpret these nods and winks and innuendoes. Maria danced with Martin. She came home with Martin. She sat alone with Martin, and she had been strictly forbidden by her mother to meet Martin. That is obvious. But what is not, after all these years, quite so clear is for what reason Mrs. Allen disapproved. On the face of it Martin Rishton was a very good match for Maria Allen. He was well born, he had been educated at Oxford, he was the heir of his uncle Sir Richard Bettenson, and Sir Richard Bettenson had five thousand a year and no children. Nevertheless, Maria's mother warmly opposed the match. She said rather vaguely that Martin 'had been extravagant at Oxford, and that she had heard some story that he had done something unworthy of a gentleman'.

But her ostensible objections were based perhaps upon others which were less easy to state. There was her daughter's character, for example. Maria was 'a droll girl with a very great love of sport and mirth'. Her temper was lively and warm. She was extremely outspoken. 'If possible,' Fanny said, 'she is too sincere. She pays too little regard to the world; and indulges herself with too much freedom of raillery and pride of disdain towards those whose vices and follies offend her.' When Mrs. Allen looked from Maria to Martin she saw, there can be no doubt, something that made her uneasy. But what? Perhaps it was nothing more than that Martin was particular about appearances and Maria rather slack; that Martin was conventional by nature and Maria the very opposite; that Martin liked dress and decorum and that Maria was one of those heedless girls who say the first thing that comes into their heads and never reflect, if they are amused themselves, what people will say if they have holes in their stockings. Whatever the reason, Mrs. Allen forbade the match; and Sir Richard Bettenson, whether to meet her views or for educational purposes, sent his nephew in the beginning of 1771 to travel for two years abroad. Maria remained at Lynn.

Five months, however, had not passed before Martin burst in unexpectedly at a dinner party of relations in Welbeck Street. He looked very well, but when he was asked why he had come back in such a hurry, 'he smiled, but said nothing to the question'. Maria, although still at Lynn, at once got wind of his arrival. Soon she saw him at a dance, but she did not dance with him and the ban was evidently enforced, for her letters become plaintive and agitated and hint at secrets that she cannot reveal, even to her dear toads the Burneys. It was now her turn to be sent abroad, partly to be out of Martin's way, partly to finish her education. She was dispatched to Geneva. But the Burneys soon received a packet from her. In the first place, she had some little commissions that she must ask them to discharge. Would they send her a pianoforte, some music, Fordyce's sermons, a tea cadet, an ebony inkstand with silver-plated tops, and a very pretty naked wax doll with blue eyes to be had in Fleet-street for half a crown—all of which, if well wrapped up, could travel safely in the case of the pianoforte. She had no money to pay with at the moment, for she had been persuaded and indeed was sure that it was true economy if one passed through

Paris to spend all one's money on clothes. But she could always sell her diamonds or she would give them 'a bill on somebody in London'. These trifling matters dispatched, she turned to something of far greater importance. Indeed, what she had to say was so important that it must be burnt at once. Indeed, it was only her great distress and being alone in a foreign land that led her to tell them at all. But the truth was—so far as can now be ascertained among the fragments and the dashes—the truth was that she had gone much farther with Martin than anybody knew. She had in fact confessed her love to him. And he had proposed something which had made her very angry. She had refused to do it. She had written him a very angry letter. She had had indeed to write it three times over before she got it right. When he read it he was furious. 'Did my character', he wrote, 'ever give you reason to imagine I should expose you because you loved me? 'Tis thoroughly unnatural—I defy the world to bring an instance of my behaving unworthy the Character of a Gentleman.' These were his very words. And, Maria wrote, 'I think such the sentiments of a Man of Honour, and such I hope to find him', she concluded; for although she knew very well that Hetty Burney and Mr. Crisp disliked him, he was—here she came out with it—the man 'on whom all my happiness in this Life depends and in whom I *wish* to see no faults'. The Burneys hid the letters, breathed not a word to their parents, and waited in suspense. Nor did they have to wait long. Before the spring was over Maria was back again in Poland Street and in circumstances so romantic, so exciting and above all so secret that 'I dare not,' Fanny exclaimed, 'commit particulars to paper.' This much (and one would have thought it enough) only could be said: 'Miss Allen—for the last time I shall call her so,—came home on Monday last . . . she—was married last Saturday!' It was true. Martin Rishton had gone out secretly to join her abroad. They had been married at Ypres on May 16th, 1772. On the 18th Maria reached England and confided the grand secret to Fanny and Susan Burney, but she told no one else. They were afraid to tell her mother. They were afraid to tell Dr. Burney. In their dilemma they turned to the strange man who was always their confidant—to Samuel Crisp of Chessington.

Many years before this Samuel Crisp had retired from the world. He had been a man of parts, a man of fashion, and a man of



great social charm. But his fine friends had wasted his substance and his clever friends had damned his play. In disgust with the insincerity of fashionable life and the fickleness of fame he had withdrawn to a decayed manor house near London, which, however, was so far from the high road and so hidden from travellers in the waste of a common that no one could find it unless specially instructed. But Mr. Crisp was careful to issue no instructions. The Burneys were almost the only friends who knew the way across the fields to his door. But the Burneys could never come often enough. He depended upon the Burneys for life and society and for news of the great world which he despised and yet could not forget. The Burney children stood to him in the place of his own children. Upon them he lavished all the shrewdness and knowledge and disillusionment which he had won at such cost to himself and now found so useless in an old manor house on a wild common with only old Mrs. Hamilton and young Kitty Cook to bear him company.

It was then, to Chessington and to Daddy Crisp that Maria Rishton and Susan Burney made their way on June 7th with their tremendous secret burning in their breasts. At first Maria was too nervous to tell him the plain truth. She tried to enlighten him with hints and hums and haws. But she succeeded only in rousing his wrath against Martin, which he expressed so strongly, 'almost calling him a Mahoon', that Maria began to kindle and ran off in a huff to her bedroom. Here she resolved to take the bull by the horns. She summoned Kitty Cook and sent her to Mr. Crisp with a saucy message: 'Mrs. Rishton sent compts. and hoped to see him at Stanhoe this summer'. Upon receiving the message Mr. Crisp came in haste to the girls' bedroom. An extraordinary scene then took place. Maria knelt on the floor and hid her face in the bed-clothes. Mr. Crisp commanded her to tell the truth—was she indeed Mrs. Rishton? Maria could not speak. Kitty Cook 'claw'd hold of her left hand and shew'd him the ring'. Then Susan produced two letters from Martin which proved the fact beyond doubt. They had been married legally. They were man and wife. If that were so, there was only one thing to be done, Mr. Crisp declared—Mrs. Burney must be informed and the marriage must be made public at once. He behaved with all the sense and decision of a man of the world. He wrote to Maria's mother—he explained the whole situation. On getting the letter Mrs. Burney was extremely angry. She

received the couple—she could do nothing else—but she never liked Martin and she never altogether forgave her daughter. However, the deed was done, and now the young couple had nothing to do but to settle down to enjoy the delights which they had snatched so impetuously.

All now depended, for those who loved Maria—and Fanny Burney loved her very dearly—upon the character of Martin Rishton. Was he, as Mr. Crisp almost said, a Mahoon? Or was he, as his sister openly declared, a Bashaw? Would he make her happy or would he not? The discerning and affectionate eyes of Fanny were now turned observingly upon Martin to find out. And yet it was very difficult to find out anything for certain. He was a strange mixture. He was high-spirited; he was ‘prodigiously agreeable’. But he was somehow, with his talk of vulgarity and distinction, rather exacting—he liked his wife to do him credit. For example, the Rishtons went on to take the waters at Bath, and there were the usual gaieties in progress. Fischer was giving a concert, and the eldest Miss Linley was singing, perhaps for the last time. All Bath would be there. But poor Maria sat alone in the lodgings writing to Fanny, and the reason she gave was a strange one. Martin, ‘who is rather more exact about dress than I am, can’t think of my appearing’ unless she bought a ‘suit of mignonet linen fringed for second mourning’ to go in. She refused; the dress was too expensive; ‘and as he was unwilling I should appear else, I gave up the dear Fischer—see what a cruel thing to have a sposo who is rather a p-p-y in those sort of things’. So there she sat alone; and she hated Bath; and she found servants such a nuisance—she had had to dismiss the butler already. At the same time, she was head over heels in love with her Risby, and one would like to suppose that the tiff about the dress was made up by the present of Romeo, the remarkably fine brown Pomeranian dog, which Martin bought for a large sum at this time and gave her. Martin himself had a passion for dogs.

It was no doubt in order to gratify his love of sport and Maria’s dislike of towns that they moved on later that spring to Teignmouth, or as Maria calls it, to ‘Tingmouth’, in Devon. The move was entirely to her liking. Her letters gushed and bubbled, had fewer stops and more dashes than ever, as she endeavoured to describe the delights of Tingmouth to Fanny in London. Their cot-

tage was 'one of the neatest Thatch'd cottages you ever saw'. It belonged to a sea captain. It was full of china glass flowers that he had brought home from his voyages. It was hung with prints from the Prayer Book and the Bible. There were also two pictures, one said to be by Raphael, the other by Correggio. The Miss Minifies might have described it as a retreat for a heroine. It looked on to a green. The fisher-people were simple and happy. Their cottages were clean and their children were healthy. The sea was full of whiting, salmon, and young mackerel. Martin had bought a brace of beautiful spaniels. It was a great diversion to make them go into the water. 'Indeed, we intend getting a very large Newfoundland dog before we leave this place.' And they intended to go for expeditions and take their dinner with them. And Fanny must come. Nothing could serve them but that Fanny should come and stay. It was monstrous for her to say that she must stop at home and copy her father's manuscripts. She must come at once; and if she came she need not spend a penny, for Maria wore nothing but a common linen gown and had not had her hair dressed once since she came here. In short, Fanny must come.

Thus solicited, Fanny arrived some time in July, 1773, and for almost two months lodged in the boxroom—the other rooms were so littered with dogs and poultry that they had to put her in the boxroom—and observed the humours of Tingmouth society and the moods of the lovers. There could be no doubt that they were still very much in love, but the truth was that Tingmouth was very gay. A great many families made it their summer resort; there were the Phippses and the Hurrels and the Westerns and the Colbournes; there was Mr. Crispen—perhaps the most distinguished man in Tingmouth—Mr. Green who lodged with Mr. Crispen and Miss Bowdler. Naturally, in so small a place, everybody knew everybody. The Phippses, the Hurrels, the Rishtons, the Colbournes, Mr. Crispen, Mr. Green and Miss Bowdler must meet incessantly. They must make up parties to go to the wrestling matches, and attend the races in their whiskeys, and see the country people run after a pig whose tail had been cut off. Much coming and going was inevitable; but, as Fanny soon observed, it was not altogether to Martin's liking. 'They will soon make this as errant a public place as Bristol Hotwells or any other place,' he grumbled. He had nothing whatever to say against the Phippses or the Westerns; he had the

greatest respect for the Hurrels, which was odd, considering how very fat and greedy Mr. Hurrel was; Mr. Crispen, of course, who lived at Bath and spoke Italian perfectly, one must respect; but the fact was, Martin confided to Fanny, that he 'almost detested' Miss Bowdler. Miss Bowdler came of a respectable family. Her brother was destined to edit Shakespeare. Her family were old friends of the Allens. One could not forbid her the house; in fact she was always in and out of it; and yet, said Martin, 'he could not endure even the sight of her'. 'A woman', said Martin, 'who despises the customs and manners of the country she lives in, must, consequently, conduct herself with impropriety.' And, indeed, she did. For though she was only twenty-six she had come to Tingmouth alone; and then she made no secret of the fact, indeed she avowed it quite openly 'in the fair face of day', that she visited Mr. Crispen in his lodgings, and not merely paid a call but stayed to supper. Nobody had 'the most distant shadow of doubt of Miss Bowdler's being equally innocent with those who have more worldly prudence' but at the same time nobody could doubt that Miss Bowdler found the society of gentlemen more entertaining than that of ladies—or could deny that though Mr. Crispen was old, Mr. Green who lodged with him was young. Then, of course, she came on to the Rishtons and encouraged Maria in her least desirable attribute—her levity, her love of chaff, her carelessness of dress and deportment. It was deplorable.

Fanny Burney liked Martin very much and listened to his complaints with sympathy; but for all her charm and distinction, indeed because of them, she was destined unfortunately to make matters worse. Among her gifts she had the art of being extremely attractive to elderly gentlemen. Soon Mr. Crispen was paying her outrageous attentions. 'Little Burney' he said was irresistible; the name of Burney would be found—with many others, Miss Bowdler interjected—cut upon his heart. Mr. Crispen must implore one kiss. It was said of course in jest, but Miss Bowdler took it of course in earnest. Had she not nursed Mr. Crispen through a dangerous illness? Had she not sacrificed her maidenly reputation by visiting him in his cottage? And then Martin, who had been perhaps already annoyed by Mr. Crispen's social predominance, found it galling in the extreme to have that gentleman always in the house, always paying outrageous compliments to his guest. Anything that

'led towards flirtation' he disliked; and soon Mr. Crispen had become, Fanny observed, almost as odious as Miss Bowdler. He threw himself into the study of Italian grammar; he read aloud to Maria and Fanny from the *Faery Queen*, 'omitting whatever, to the poet's great disgrace, has crept in that is improper for a woman's ear'. But what with Miss Bowdler, Mr. Crispen, the Tingmouthians and the influence of undesirable acquaintances upon his wife, there can be no doubt that Martin was very uncomfortable at Tingmouth, and when the time came, on September 17th, to say good-bye he appeared 'in monstrous spirits'. Perhaps everybody was glad that the summer was at an end. They were glad to say good-bye and glad to be able to say it in civil terms. Mr. Crispen left for Bath; and Miss Bowdler—there is no rashness in the assumption—left, for Bath also.

The Rishtons proceeded in their whiskey with all their dogs to visit the Westerns, one of the few families with whom Martin cared to associate. But the journey was unfortunate. They began by taking the wrong turning, then they ran over Tingmouth, the Newfoundland dog, who was running under the body of the whiskey. Then at Oxford Maria longed to see the colleges, but feeling sure that Martin's pride would be hurt at showing himself in a whiskey with a wife where in the old days he had 'shone forth a gay bachelor with a phaeton and four bays', she refused his offer to take her, and had her hair dressed, very badly, instead. Off they went again, and again they ran over two more dogs. Worst of all, when they arrived at the Westerns' they found the whole house shut up and the Westerns gone to Buckinghamshire. Altogether it was an unfortunate expedition. And it is impossible, as one reads Maria's breathless volubility to Fanny, to resist the conviction that the journey with its accidents and mistakes, with its troop of dogs, and Martin's pride, and Maria's fears and her recourse to the hairdresser and the hairdresser's ill success, and Martin's memories of gay bachelor days and phaetons and bay horses and his respect for the Westerns and his love of servants was typical of the obscure years of married life that were now to succeed each other at Stanhoe, in Norfolk.

At Stanhoe they lived the lives of country gentry. They repaired the ancient house, though they had but the lease of it. They planted and cleaned and cut new walks in the garden. They bought a cow

and started a dairy for Maria. Dog was added to dog—rare dogs, wonderful dogs, spaniels, lurchers, Portugal pointers from the banks of the Dowrow. To keep up the establishment as establishments should be kept up, nine servants, in Martin's opinion, were none too many. And so, though she had no children, Maria found that all her time was occupied with her household and the care of her establishment. But how far better she wrote, to be active like this instead of leading 'the loitering life' she had led at Tingmouth! Surely, Maria continued, scribbling her heart out ungrammatically to Fanny Burney, 'there are pleasures for every station and employment', and one cannot be bored if 'as I hope I am acting properly'; so that in sober truth she did not envy Fanny Lord Stanhope's *fête-champêtre*, since she had her chickens and her dairy, and Tingmouth, who had had the distemper, must be led out on a string. Why, then, regret Miss Bowdler and Mr. Crispen and the sport and gaiety of the old days at Tingmouth? Nevertheless, the old days kept coming back to her mind. At Tingmouth, she reflected, they had only kept a man and a maid. Here they had nine servants, and the more there are the more 'cabally and insolent' they become. And then relations came over from Lynn and pried into her kitchen and made her more 'bashful', as Martin would say, than ever. And then if she sat down to her tambour for half an hour Martin, 'who is I believe the Most Active Creature alive', would burst in and say. 'Come Maria, you must go with me and see how charmingly Damon hunts'—or he would say 'I know of a pheasant's nest about two miles off, you shall go and see it'.

'Then away we trail broiling over Cornfields—and when we come to the pit some Unlucky boy has Stole the Eggs . . . then I spend Whole Mornings seeing him Shoot Rooks—grub up trees—and at night for we never come in now till Nine o'clock—when tea is over and I have settled my accounts or done some company business—bed-time Comes.'

Bedtime had come; and the day had been somehow disappointing.

How could she mend matters? How could she save money so that Martin could buy the phaeton upon which his heart had been set ever since they were married? She might save on dress, for she did not mind what she wore; but alas; Martin was very particular still; he did not like her to dress in linen. So she must manage better

in the house, and she was not formed to manage servants. Thus she began to dwell upon those happy days before she had gone to Tingmouth, before she had married, before she had nine servants and a phaeton and ever so many dogs. She began to brood over that still more distant time when she had first known the Burneys and they had sat 'browsing over my little [fire] and eating good things out of the closet by the fire side'. Her thoughts turned to all those friends whom she had lost, to that 'lovd society which I remember with the greatest pleasure'; and she could never forget in particular the paternal kindness of Dr. Burney. Oh, she sighed as she sat alone in Norfolk among the pheasants and the fields, how she wished that 'none of my family had ever quitted his sheltering roof till placed under the protection of a worthy husband'. For her own marriage—but enough; they had been very much in love; they had been very happy; she must go and do her hair; she must try to please her Rishy. And so the obscure history of the Rishtons fades away, save what is preserved by the sprightly pen of Maria's half-sister in the pages of *Evelina*. And yet—the reflection will occur—if Fanny had seen more of Maria, and more of Mr. Crispen and even more of Miss Bowdler and the Tingmouth set, her later books, had they been less refined, might have been as amusing as her first.

## Mrs. Thrale<sup>1</sup>

NO one can destroy Boswell's sketch of Mrs. Thrale. It is done with such venom and such vivacity; it contains so much of Boswell himself, and, like all Boswell's portraits, it fits so perfectly into its place in the picture. But Mr. Clifford<sup>2</sup> has done what is far more valuable and more difficult. He has gone behind Boswell's sketch and beyond it. He has amplified it and solidified it. He has brought Mrs. Thrale herself into the foreground. And by so doing he has changed the proportions of the picture.

Mrs. Thrale herself has lived an ambiguous scattered life all these years in a mass of half-published or unpublished documents sprinkled over England and America. And for years Mr. Clifford has been tracking her down and piecing her together with the most devoted care and the most triumphant results. If it were not that her diary and her commonplace book are still in the hands of an American editor, we should suppose that the whole woman is now before us. As it is we know her better perhaps than almost any living person. We can follow her, as we cannot follow our friends, at a foot's pace for more than eighty years. Yet the effect of this minute illumination is baffling. The more we know of people the less we can sum them up. Just as we think to hold the bird in our hands, the bird flits off. Who can explain, for example, why the brilliant and precocious Hester consented to marry the man whom Mr. Clifford now reveals in his entirety—the odious Thrale? When her father discovered their clandestine correspondence he fell dead in a fit. And for once the incompetent, irascible, impecunious Welsh squire was in the right. No marriage could have been more incongruous. Hester was impressionable, generous, intellectual. Thrale was a cold, callous, conventional man of business who aped the habits of the aristocracy but was without their distinction, who had the grossness of the middle class but lacked their geniality. If he had any affection besides his passion for meat and drink, it was not for Hester but for her mother. Yet Hester married him and was

<sup>1</sup> Written in February, 1941

<sup>2</sup> *Hester Lynch Piozzi (Mrs. Thrale)*. By James L. Clifford



at once immured in the great house at Streatham, 'like a kept mistress', as Johnson said, 'shut from the world'.

It was her marriage, however, that gave depth to her relationship with Johnson. Had she been happy, she would never have known him as she did. He gave her, of course, the obvious things—stimulus, society, an outlet for her irrepressible curiosity and ambition. But the friendship between the young wife and the old man was based on deeper things. Johnson was not merely a distinguished guest at dinner. He had the run of the house. He and his hostess went together behind the scenes. It was to Johnson that Mrs. Thrale turned when her eyes were red with crying—when Queeney snubbed her; when Mr. Thrale took another mistress; when ruin threatened them; when one after another the children were born, and the children fell ill and died. 'What shall I do? What can I do? Has the flattery of my friends made me too proud of my Brains? and must these poor Children suffer for my crime?' she cried out to him in her anguish. He gave her counsel and confidence. In return she gave him a share in the family, a stake in the next generation, and domesticity. It was by 'the pump-side in the kitchen garden' at Streatham that Johnson was caught 'fusing metals' when Mr. Thrale came back from the city and put out the fire. One anecdote sums up their relationship. Johnson had been more than usually rude to her in company, and someone protested. But Mrs. Thrale passed it off with a smile. 'Oh dear good man!' she said. And when the words were repeated to Johnson 'he seemed much delighted . . . and repeated in a loud whisper, Oh dear good man!'

Why, then, when Mr. Thrale finally ate himself to death, did a friendship that had been daily rubbed and tried for sixteen years come to an end? Partly, as Mr. Clifford makes plain, because Mrs. Thrale had suppressed a great deal. She had certain individual tastes of her own. One was a romantic passion for the scenery of Wales; another was a genuine love for painting. But when the three of them travelled in Wales, neither Johnson nor Thrale had a word of praise for the landscape; and in Paris she was left to gaze for hours in the galleries alone. Again as a writer—she scribbled incessantly—she was by nature an innovator. 'Why, she wondered, should there be one set of words for writing and another for speaking?' She saw no reason why one should not write as one speaks, familiarly, colloquially; and her pages, 'crowded with familiar

phrases and vulgar idioms', roused the disgust of the conventional. Clearly there were a thousand curiosities and desires dormant in her that the old man could not gratify. So long as she was Thrale's wife and the mistress of Streatham she must suppress them. But when her husband's dead weight was lifted off her, up she sprang. She became again the precocious and impulsive Hester Salusbury. Perhaps marriage had kept her youth green in her—she was only just past forty when she became a widow. And one day before Thrale's death Mrs. Byron had warned her, while Piozzi sang to the harpsichord: 'You know, I suppose, that that man is in Love with you?'

'That man' is one of Mr. Clifford's most remarkable reconstructions. To the Streatham circle he was merely 'an Italian musick master'. When they had said that they had said enough. But in fact he was an Italian gentleman of great charm and cultivation; a composer and performer of merit; and a passionate lover of music. He travelled with a small harpsichord fitted under the seat so that he could play Mozart and Haydn on the roads. They floated on a barge down the Brenta to the strains of his music. Nor was he lacking in the sober virtues. He managed Mrs. Piozzi's tangled money matters admirably, and he ended his days in Wales giving plum puddings to villagers and performing the duties of a country gentleman. Yet at the notion that such a man could marry a brewer's widow, the whole company of distinguished people who had feasted at her table took flight in one flock. Johnson trumpeted his rage. 'She has now become a subject for her enemies to exult over, and for her friends, if she has any left, to forget or pity.' 'Heaven be praised,' exclaimed the Queen of the Blues, 'that I have no daughters.' It was only charity that led her to conclude that Mrs. Thrale was mad. For Johnson there is the excuse that he had lost at one blow Streatham and its peaches and its pork pies and the undivided attention of his lady. The old elephant was jealous, and his rage has at least the dignity of wounded passion. But how are we to explain the conduct of the others? Only perhaps by supposing that it is almost impossible even for genius and learning to swim against the conventions of their time. And while genius and learning come down the stream untouched, the conventions in which they exist soon become obsolete and ridiculous. An Italian music master in the eighteenth century was, we must suppose, equal to a

Negro today. To explain the conduct of the Streatham set we must imagine the attitude of society today to a lady of rank who has contracted an alliance with a Negro and expects Mayfair to open its doors to her dusky and illegitimate brood.

But the more we excuse the Streatham set, the more we must admire Mrs. Piozzi. Her passion for Piozzi made her for once concentrated and direct. There is a fine ring in her letter to Johnson:

The birth of my second husband [she told him] is not meaner than that of my first; his sentiments are not meaner; his profession is not meaner . . . till you have changed your opinion of Mr. Piozzi let us converse no more.

With those words she should have vanished down the Brenta to the strains of Mozart. Unfortunately, Mr. Clifford has an inexhaustible supply of those little facts that reduce music to common speech. With Johnson it is plain that Mrs. Thrale had lost her centre. Now there was some screw loose. The whirligig spins faster and faster. She was for ever dipping and sampling, quarrelling and chattering. She was impulsive and impressionable, but she was also obtuse and tactless. Her children found her intolerable. Fanny Burney resented her patronage. She decked her little body in grebe skins and tiger shawls and flaxen wigs and many-coloured ribbons. She made a fool of herself with her adopted nephew, and let herself be cheated out of six thousand pounds to buy him a baronetcy. There was a coarseness in her fibre and a commonness in her vision that explain why, as an observer, she was so greatly inferior to Boswell.

Yet the spin of the whirligig has its fascination. Her appetite for life was prodigious. She must have someone to worship. Mrs. Siddons succeeded Dr. Johnson. Mr. Conway succeeded Mrs. Siddons. When there was no hero to entertain, she devoured books. And when the books were read, and the letters written, and the copy books filled, she had out her telescope and scoured the horizon. One day she counted forty-one sails out to sea. Then, turning her telescope to the earth, she discovered Sir John Williams five miles away searching for something in his garden. What could it be? She could not rest until she had sent a servant to ascertain that Sir John was looking for his watch.

At last, at the age of eighty, she led the dance at her birthday party with her nephew; and danced indefatigably till dawn. That

was in 1820. By that time one has almost forgotten Boswell's sketch. It was a snapshot at one particular moment. But the moment has long been covered over. She has loved; she has travelled; she has known everybody; she has been in the depths of despair and on the crest of the wave times without counting. The portrait of the old lady in the huge bonnet shows a very modern face, with her great vivacious eyes, her loose lips, and the deep scar over the mouth which, by her own wish, the artist has faithfully depicted. For that was the scar she got when her horse threw her in 1774 at Streatham.

# Two Parsons

## *I. James Woodforde*

ONE could wish that the psycho-analysts would go into the question of diary-keeping. For often it is the one mysterious fact in a life otherwise as clear as the sky and as candid as the dawn. Parson Woodforde is a case in point—his diary is the only mystery about him. For forty-three years he sat down almost daily to record what he did on Monday and what he had for dinner on Tuesday; but for whom he wrote or why he wrote it is impossible to say. He does not unburden his soul in his diary; yet it is no mere record of engagements and expenses. As for literary fame, there is no sign that he ever thought of it, and finally, though the man himself is peaceable above all things, there are little indiscretions and criticisms which would have got him into trouble and hurt the feelings of his friends had they read them. What purpose, then, did the sixty-eight little books fulfil? Perhaps it was the desire for intimacy. When James Woodforde opened one of his neat manuscript books he entered into conversation with a second James Woodforde, who was not quite the same as the reverend gentleman who visited the poor and preached in the church. These two friends said much that all the world might hear; but they had a few secrets which they shared with each other only. It was a great comfort, for example, that Christmas when Nancy, Betsy, and Mr. Walker seemed to be in conspiracy against him, to exclaim in the diary, 'The treatment I meet with for my Civility this Christmas is to me abominable'. The second James Woodforde sympathized and agreed. Again, when a stranger abused his hospitality it was a relief to inform the other self who lived in the little book that he had put him to sleep in the attic story, 'and I treated him as one that would be too free if treated kindly'. It is easy to understand why, in the quiet life of a country parish, these two bachelor friends became in time inseparable. An essential part of him would have died had he been forbidden to keep his diary. When indeed he thought himself in the grip of death he still wrote on and on. And as we read—if reading is the word for it—we seem to be listening to someone who is murmuring over the events of the day to himself in the quiet space which precedes sleep. It is not writing, and, to speak of the truth, it is not reading. It

is slipping through half a dozen pages and strolling to the window and looking out. It is going on thinking about the Woodfordes while we watch the people in the street below. It is taking a walk and making up the life and character of James Woodforde as we go. It is not reading any more than it is writing—what to call it we scarcely know

James Woodforde, then, was one of those smooth-cheeked, steady-eyed men, demure to look at, whom we can never imagine except in the prime of life. He was of an equable temper, with only such acerbities and touchinesses as are generally to be found in those who have had a love affair in their youth and remained, as they fancy, unwed because of it. The Parson's love affair, however, was nothing very tremendous. Once when he was a young man in Somerset he liked to walk over to Shepton and to visit a certain 'sweet tempered' Betsy White who lived there. He had a great mind 'to make a bold stroke' and ask her to marry him. He went so far, indeed, as to propose marriage 'when opportunity served', and Betsy was willing. But he delayed; time passed; four years passed, indeed, and Betsy went to Devonshire, met a Mr. Webster, who had five hundred pounds a year, and married him. When James Woodforde met them in the turnpike road he could say little, 'being shy', but to his diary he remarked—and this no doubt was his private version of the affair ever after—'she has proved herself to me a mere jilt'.

But he was a young man then, and as time went on we cannot help suspecting that he was glad to consider the question of marriage shelved once and for all so that he might settle down with his niece Nancy at Weston Longueville, and give himself simply and solely, every day and all day, to the great business of living. Again, what else to call it we do not know.

For James Woodforde was nothing in particular. Life had it all her own way with him. He had no special gift; he had no oddity or infirmity. It is idle to pretend that he was a zealous priest. God in Heaven was much the same to him as King George upon the throne—a kindly Monarch, that is to say, whose festivals one kept by preaching a sermon on Sunday much as one kept the Royal birthday by firing a blunderbuss and drinking a toast at dinner. Should anything untoward happen, like the death of a boy who was dragged and killed by a horse, he would instantly, but rather per-

functorily, exclaim, 'I hope to God the Poor Boy is happy', and add, 'We all came home singing'; just as when Justice Creed's peacock spread its tail—'and most noble it is'—he would exclaim, 'How wonderful are Thy Works O God in every Being'. But there was no fanaticism, no enthusiasm, no lyric impulse about James Woodforde. In all these pages, indeed, each so neatly divided into compartments, and each of those again filled, as the days themselves were filled, quietly and fully in a hand steady as the pacing of a well-tempered nag, one can only call to mind a single poetic phrase about the transit of Venus. 'It appeared as a black patch upon a fair Lady's face', he says. The words themselves are mild enough, but they hang over the undulating expanse of the Parson's prose with the resplendence of the star itself. So in the Fen country a barn or a tree appears twice its natural size against the surrounding flats. But what led him to this palpable excess that summer's night we cannot tell. It cannot have been that he was drunk. He spoke out too roundly against such failings in his brother Jack to be guilty himself. Temperamentally he was among the eaters of meat and not among the drinkers of wine. When we think of the Woodfordes, uncle and niece, we think of them as often as not waiting with some impatience for their dinner. Gravely they watch the joint as it is set upon the table; swiftly they get their knives to work upon the succulent leg or loin; without much comment, unless a word is passed about the gravy or the stuffing, they go on eating. So they munch, day after day, year in, year out, until between them they must have devoured herds of sheep and oxen, flocks of poultry, an odd dozen or so of swans and cygnets, bushels of apples and plums, while the pastries and the jellies crumble and squash beneath their spoons in mountains, in pyramids, in pagodas. Never was there a book so stuffed with food as this one is. To read the bill of fare respectfully and punctually set forth gives one a sense of repletion. Trout and chicken, mutton and peas, pork and apple sauce—so the joints succeed each other at dinner, and there is supper with more joints still to come, all, no doubt, home grown, and of the juiciest and sweetest; all cooked, often by the mistress herself, in the plainest English way, save when the dinner was at Weston Hall and Mrs. Custance surprised them with a London dainty—a pyramid of jelly, that is to say, with a 'landscape appearing through it'. After dinner sometimes, Mrs. Custance, for whom James Woodforde had a chivalrous

devotion, would play the 'Sticcardo Pastorale', and make 'very soft music indeed'; or would get out her work-box and show them how neatly contrived it was, unless indeed she were giving birth to another child upstairs. These infants the Parson would baptize and very frequently he would bury them. They died almost as frequently as they were born. The Parson had a deep respect for the Custances. They were all that country gentry should be—a little given to the habit of keeping mistresses, perhaps, but that peccadillo could be forgiven them in view of their generosity to the poor, the kindness they showed to Nancy, and their condescension in asking the Parson to dinner when they had great people staying with them. Yet great people were not much to James's liking. Deeply though he respected the nobility, 'one must confess', he said, 'that being with our equals is much more agreeable'.

Not only did Parson Woodforde know what was agreeable; that rare gift was by the bounty of Nature supplemented by another equally rare—he could have what he wanted. The age was propitious. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday—they follow each other and each little compartment seems filled with content. The days were not crowded, but they were enviably varied. Fellow of New College though he was, he did things with his own hands, not merely with his own head. He lived in every room of the house—in the study he wrote sermons, in the dining-room he ate copiously; he cooked in the kitchen, he played cards in the parlour. And then he took his coat and stick and went coursing his greyhounds in the fields. Year in, year out, the provisioning of the house and its defence against the cold of winter and the drought of summer fell upon him. Like a general he surveyed the seasons and took steps to make his own little camp safe with coal and wood and beef and beer against the enemy. His day thus had to accommodate a jumble of incongruous occupations. There is religion to be served, and the pig to be killed; the sick to be visited and dinner to be eaten; the dead to be buried and beer to be brewed; Convocation to be attended and the cow to be bolused. Life and death, mortality and immortality, jostle in his pages and make a good mixed marriage of it: '... found the old gentleman almost at his last gasp. Totally senseless with rattlings in his Throat. Dinner to-day boiled beef and Rabbit roasted.' All is as it should be; life is like that.

Surely, surely, then, here is one of the breathing-spaces in human



affairs—here in Norfolk at the end of the eighteenth century at the Parsonage. For once man is content with his lot; harmony is achieved; his house fits him; a tree is a tree; a chair is a chair; each knows its office and fulfils it. Looking through the eyes of Parson Woodforde, the different lives of men seem orderly and settled. Far away guns roar; a King falls; but the sound is not loud enough to scare the rooks here in Norfolk. The proportions of things are different. The Continent is so distant that it looks a mere blur; America scarcely exists; Australia is unknown. But a magnifying glass is laid upon the fields of Norfolk. Every blade of grass is visible there. We see every lane and every field; the ruts on the roads and the peasants' faces. Each house stands in its own breadth of meadows isolated and independent. No wires link village to village. No voices thread the air. The body also is more present and more real. It suffers more acutely. No anaesthetic deadens physical pain. The surgeon's knife hovers real and sharp above the limb. Cold strikes unmitigated upon the house. The milk freezes in the pans; the water is thick with ice in the basins. One can scarcely walk from one room to another in the parsonage in winter. Poor men and women are frozen to death upon the roads. Often no letters come and there are no visitors and no newspapers. The Parsonage stands alone in the midst of the frost-bound fields. At last, Heaven be praised, life circulates again; a man comes to the door with a Madagascar monkey; another brings a box containing a child with two distinct perfect heads; there is a rumour that a balloon is going to rise at Norwich. Every little incident stands out sharp and clear. The drive to Norwich even is something of an adventure. One must trundle every step of the way behind a horse. But look how distinct the trees stand in the hedges; how slowly the cattle move their heads as the carriage trots by; how gradually the spires of Norwich raise themselves above the hill. And then how clear-cut and familiar are the faces of the few people who are our friends—the Custances, Mr. du Quesne. Friendship has time to solidify, to become a lasting, a valuable possession.

True, Nancy of the younger generation is visited now and then by a flighty notion that she is missing something, that she wants something. One day she complained to her uncle that life was very dull: she complained 'of the dismal situation of my house, nothing to be seen, and little or no visiting or being visited, &c.', and made him

very uneasy. We could read Nancy a little lecture upon the folly of wanting that 'et cetera'. Look what your 'et cetera' has brought to pass, we might say; half the countries of Europe are bankrupt; there is a red line of villas on every green hillside; your Norfolk roads are black as tar; there is no end to 'visiting or being visited'. But Nancy has an answer to make us, to the effect that our past is her present. You, she says, think it a great privilege to be born in the eighteenth century, because one called cowslips pagles and rode in a curricule instead of driving in a car. But you are utterly wrong, you fanatical lovers of memoirs, she goes on. I can assure you, my life was often intolerably dull. I did not laugh at the things that make you laugh. It did not amuse me when my uncle dreamt of a hat or saw bubbles in the beer, and said that meant a death in the family; I thought so too. Betsy Davy mourned young Walker with all her heart in spite of dressing in sprigged paduasoy. There is a great deal of humbug talked of the eighteenth century. Your delight in old times and old diaries is half impure. You make up something that never had any existence. Our sober reality is only a dream to you—so Nancy grieves and complains, living through the eighteenth century day by day, hour by hour.

Still, if it is a dream, let us indulge it a moment longer. Let us believe that some things last, and some places and some people are not touched by change. On a fine May morning, with the rooks rising and the hares scampering and the plover calling among the long grass, there is much to encourage the illusion. It is we who change and perish. Parson Woodforde lives on. It is the kings and queens who lie in prison. It is the great towns that are ravaged with anarchy and confusion. But the river Wensum still flows; Mrs. Custance is brought to bed of yet another baby; there is the first swallow of the year. The spring comes, and summer with its hay and strawberries; then autumn, when the walnuts are exceptionally fine though the pears are poor; so we lapse into winter, which is indeed boisterous, but the house, thank God, withstands the storm; and then again there is the first swallow, and Parson Woodforde takes his greyhounds out a-coursing.

## *II. The Rev. John Skinner*

A whole world separates Woodforde, who was born in 1740 and

died in 1803, from Skinner, who was born in 1772 and died in 1839.

For the few years that separated the two parsons are those momentous years that separate the eighteenth century from the nineteenth. Camerton, it is true, lying in the heart of Somersetshire, was a village of the greatest antiquity; nevertheless, before five pages of the diary are turned we read of coal-works, and how there was a great shouting at the coal-works because a fresh vein of coal had been discovered, and the proprietors had given money to the workmen to celebrate an event which promised such prosperity to the village. Then, though the country gentlemen seemed set as firmly in their seats as ever, it happened that the manor house at Camerton, with all the rights and duties pertaining to it, was in the hands of the Jarretts, whose fortune was derived from the Jamaica trade. This novelty, this incursion of an element quite unknown to Woodforde in his day, had its disturbing influence no doubt upon the character of Skinner himself. Irritable, nervous, apprehensive, he seems to embody, even before the age itself had come into existence, all the strife and unrest of our distracted times. He stands, dressed in the prosaic and unbecoming stocks and pantaloons of the early nineteenth century, at the parting of the ways. Behind him lay order and discipline and all the virtues of the heroic past, but directly he left his study he was faced with drunkenness and immorality; with indiscipline and irreligion; with Methodism and Roman Catholicism; with the Reform Bill and the Catholic Emancipation Act, with a mob clamouring for freedom, with the overthrow of all that was decent and established and right. Tormented and querulous, at the same time conscientious and able, he stands at the parting of the ways, unwilling to yield an inch, unable to concede a point, harsh, peremptory, apprehensive, and without hope.

Private sorrow had increased the natural acerbity of his temper. His wife had died young, leaving him with four small children, and of these the best-loved, Laura, a child who shared his tastes and would have sweetened his life, for she already kept a diary and had arranged a cabinet of shells with the utmost neatness, died too. But these losses, though they served nominally to make him love God the better, in practice led him to hate men more. By the time the diary opens in 1822 he was fixed in his opinion that the mass of men are unjust and malicious, and that the people of Camerton are

more corrupt even than the mass of men. But by that date he was also fixed in his profession. Fate had taken him from the lawyer's office, where he would have been in his element, dealing out justice, filling up forms, keeping strictly to the letter of the law, and had planted him at Camerton among churchwardens and farmers, the Gullicks and the Padfields, the old woman who had dropsy, the idiot boy, and the dwarf. Nevertheless, however sordid his tasks and disgusting his parishioners, he had his duty to them; and with them he would remain. Whatever insults he suffered, he would live up to his principles, uphold the right, protect the poor, and punish the wrongdoer. By the time the diary opens, this strenuous and unhappy career is in full swing.

Perhaps the village of Camerton in the year 1822, with its coal-mines and the disturbance they brought, was no fair sample of English village life. Certainly it is difficult, as one follows the Rector on his daily rounds, to indulge in pleasant dreams about the quaintness and amenity of old English rural life. Here, for instance, he was called to see Mrs. Gooch—a woman of weak mind, who had been locked up alone in her cottage and fallen into the fire and was in agony. 'Why do you not help me, I say? Why do you not help me?' she cried. And the Rector, as he heard her screams, knew that she had come to this through no fault of her own. Her efforts to keep a home together had led to drink, and so she had lost her reason, and what with the squabbles between the Poor Law officials and the family as to who should support her, what with her husband's extravagance and drunkenness, she had been left alone, had fallen into the fire, and so died. Who was to blame? Mr. Purnell, the miserly magistrate, who was all for cutting down the allowance paid to the poor, or Hicks the Overseer, who was notoriously harsh, or the alehouses, or the Methodists, or what? At any rate the Rector had done his duty. However he might be hated for it, he always stood up for the rights of the downtrodden; he always told people of their faults, and convicted them of evil. Then there was Mrs. Somer, who kept a house of ill-fame and was bringing up her daughters to the same profession. Then there was Farmer Lippeatt, who, turned out of the Red Post at midnight, dead drunk, missed his way, fell into a quarry, and died of a broken breastbone. Wherever one turned there was suffering, wherever one looked one found cruelty behind that suffering. Mr. and Mrs. Hicks, for example, the

Overseers, let an infirm pauper lie for ten days in the Poor House without care, 'so that maggots had bred in his flesh and eaten great holes in his body'. His only attendant was an old woman, who was so failing that she was unable to lift him. Happily the pauper died. Happily poor Garratt, the miner, died too. For to add to the evils of drink and poverty and the cholera there was constant peril from the mine itself. Accidents were common and the means of treating them elementary. A fall of coal had broken Garratt's back, but he lingered on, though exposed to the crude methods of country surgeons, from January to November, when at last death released him. Both the stern Rector and the flippant Lady of the Manor, to do them justice, were ready with their half-crowns, with their soups and their medicines, and visited sick-beds without fail. But even allowing for the natural asperity of Mr. Skinner's temper, it would need a very rosy pen and a very kindly eye to make a smiling picture of life in the village of Camerton a century ago. Half-crowns and soup went a very little way to remedy matters, sermons and denunciations made them perhaps even worse.

The Rector found refuge from Camerton neither in dissipation like some of his neighbours, nor in sport like others. Occasionally he drove over to dine with a brother cleric, but he noted acrimoniously that the entertainment was 'better suited to Grosvenor Square than a Clergyman's home—French dishes and French wines in profusion', and records with a note of exclamation that it was eleven o'clock before he drove home. When his children were young he sometimes walked with them in the fields, or amused himself by making them a boat, or rubbed up his Latin in an epitaph for the tomb of some pet dog or tame pigeon. And sometimes he leant back peacefully and listened to Mrs. Fenwick as she sang the songs of Moore to her husband's accompaniment on the flute. But even such harmless pleasures were poisoned with suspicion. A farmer stared insolently as he passed; someone threw a stone from a window; Mrs. Jarrett clearly concealed some evil purpose behind her cordiality. No, the only refuge from Camerton lay in Camalodunum. The more he thought of it the more certain he became that he had the singular good fortune to live on the identical spot where lived the father of Caractacus, where Ostorius established his colony, where Arthur had fought the traitor Modred, where Alfred very nearly came in his misfortunes. Camerton was undoubtedly

the Camalodunum of Tacitus. Shut up in his study alone with his documents, copying, comparing, proving indefatigably, he was safe, at rest, even happy. He was also, he became convinced, on the track of an important etymological discovery, by which it could be proved that there was a secret significance 'in every letter that entered into the composition of Celtic names'. No archbishop was as content in his palace as Skinner the antiquary was content in his cell. To these pursuits he owed, too, those rare and delightful visits to Stourhead, the seat of Sir Richard Hoare, when at last he mixed with men of his own calibre, and met the gentlemen who were engaged in examining the antiquities of Wiltshire. However hard it froze, however high the snow lay heaped on the roads, Skinner rode over to Stourhead; and sat in the library, with a violent cold, but in perfect content, making extracts from Seneca, and extracts from Diodorum Siculus, and extracts from Ptolemy's *Geography*, or scornfully disposed of some rash and ill-informed fellow-antiquary who had the temerity to assert that Camalodunum was really situated at Colchester. On he went with his extracts, with his theories, with his proofs, in spite of the malicious present of a rusty nail wrapped in paper from his parishioners, in spite of the laughing warning of his host: 'Oh, Skinner, you will bring everything at last to Camalodunum; be content with what you have already discovered; if you fancy too much you will weaken the authority of real facts.' Skinner replied with a sixth letter thirty-four pages long; for Sir Richard did not know how necessary Camalodunum had become to an embittered man who had daily to encounter Hicks the Overseer and Purnell the magistrate, the brothels, the ale-houses, the Methodists, the dropsies and bad legs of Camerton. Even the floods were mitigated if one could reflect that thus Camalodunum must have looked in the time of the Britons.

So he filled three iron chests with ninety-eight volumes of manuscript. But by degrees the manuscripts ceased to be entirely concerned with Camalodunum; they began to be largely concerned with John Skinner. It was true that it was important to establish the truth about Camalodunum, but it was also important to establish the truth about John Skinner. In fifty years after his death, when the diaries were published, people would know not only that John Skinner was a great antiquary, but that he was a much-wronged,

much-suffering man. His diary became his confidante, as it was to become his champion. For example, was he not the most affectionate of fathers, he asked the diary? He had spent endless time and trouble on his sons; he had sent them to Winchester and Cambridge, and yet now when the farmers were so insolent about paying him his tithes, and gave him a broken-backed lamb for his share, or fobbed him off with less than his due of cocks, his son Joseph refused to help him. His son said that the people of Camerton laughed at him; that he treated his children like servants; that he suspected evil where none was meant. And then he opened a letter by chance and found a bill for a broken gig; and then his sons lounged about smoking cigars when they might have helped him to mount his drawings. In short, he could not stand their presence in his house. He dismissed them in a fury to Bath. When they had gone he could not help admitting that perhaps he had been at fault. It was his querulous temper again—but then he had so much to make him querulous. Mrs. Jarrett's peacock screamed under his window all night. They jangled the church bells on purpose to annoy him. Still, he would try; he would let them come back. So Joseph and Owen came back. And then the old irritation overcame him again. He 'could not help saying' something about being idle, or drinking too much cider, upon which there was a terrible scene and Joseph broke one of the parlour chairs. Owen took Joseph's part. So did Anna. None of his children cared for him. Owen went further. Owen said 'I was a madman and ought to have a commission of lunacy to investigate my conduct'. And, further, Owen cut him to the quick by pouring scorn on his verses, on his diaries and archaeological theories. He said 'No one would read the nonsense I had written. When I mentioned having gained a prize at Trinity College . . . his reply was that none but the most stupid fellows ever thought of writing for the college prize.' Again there was a terrible scene; again they were dismissed to Bath, followed by their father's curses. And then Joseph fell ill with the family consumption. At once his father was all tenderness and remorse. He sent for doctors, he offered to take him for a sea trip to Ireland, he took him indeed to Weston and went sailing with him on the sea. Once more the family came together. And once more the querulous, exacting father could not help, for all his concern, exasperating the children whom, in his own crabbed way, he yet genuinely loved. The

question of religion cropped up. Owen said his father was no better than a Deist or a Socinian. And Joseph, lying ill upstairs, said he was too tired for argument; he did not want his father to bring drawings to show him; he did not want his father to read prayers to him, 'he would rather have some other person to converse with than me'. So in the crisis of their lives, when a father should have been closest to them, even his children turned away from him. There was nothing left to live for Yet what had he done to make everyone hate him? Why did the farmers call him mad? Why did Joseph say that no one would read what he wrote? Why did the villagers tie tin cans to the tail of his dog? Why did the peacocks shriek and the bells ring? Why was there no mercy shown to him and no respect and no love? With agonizing repetition the diary asks these questions; but there was no answer. At last, one morning in December, 1839, the Rector took his gun, walked into the beech wood near his home, and shot himself dead.



## Money and Love<sup>1</sup>

STEEP though the ascent may be, the reward is ours when we stand on the top of the hill; stout though the biography undoubtedly is, the prospect falls into shape directly we have found the connecting word. The diligent reader of memoirs seeks it on every page—never rests until he has found it. Is it love or ambition, commerce, religion, or sport? It may be none of these, but something deep sunk beneath the surface, scattered in fragments, disguised behind frippery. Whatever it be, wherever it be, once found there is no biography without its form, no figure without its force. Stumbling and blundering in the first volume of Mr. Coleridge's life of Thomas Coutts,<sup>2</sup> we laid hands at length upon two words which between them licked rather a portly subject into shape, doing their work, as might be expected from their opposite natures, first this side, then that, until what with a blow here and a blow there poor Thomas Coutts was almost buffeted to death. Yet the friction kept him alive; he lived, in an emaciated condition, to the age of eighty-six. And of the two words one is money and the other is love.

Love in the first place had it all its own way. He married his brother's servant, Susannah Starkie, a woman older than himself. If he had been a poor man the marriage would have been thought sensible enough and the wife, one may be sure, would have come in for a word of praise from the biographers. But as he was always a rich man, and became eventually the richest man in the whole of England, it was incumbent on Thomas Coutts to prove that the Starkies, though now declined, were descended from the ancient family of the Starkies of Leigh and Pennington, and it is inevitable that we should inquire whether Mrs. Coutts broke her heart and lost her wits 'beneath the burden of an honour to which she was not born'. There is no doubt that she lost her wits. Her heart, one must suppose, since no sound of its breakage has escaped, was smothered to death. She is scarcely mentioned. Perhaps she dropped her aitches. Perhaps it was as much as she could do to stand upright at

<sup>1</sup> *The Athenaeum*, March 12th, 1920

<sup>2</sup> *The Life of Thomas Coutts, Banker*, by Ernest Hartley Coleridge

the top of the staircase in Stratton Street and shake hands with the Royal Dukes without displaying her origin. She contrived never to give offence and never to attract attention; and, from a housemaid, what more could be expected? Save for one sinister gleam when she speaks a whole sentence in her proper person, it is all dark and dim and decorous. She had her children, it is true; of whom three daughters survived. But the children were heiresses, and must be sent to fashionable schools, where Mr. Coutts, more ambitious for them than for himself, hinted his wish that they should make friends with the daughters of Lord George Sutton, 'as I should like them to be acquainted with honest people'. They had a French Countess of the old nobility for their governess. From their birth onwards they were swathed and swaddled in money.

In his office in the Strand, year in, year out, Thomas Coutts made his fortune by methods which will be plain enough to some readers and must remain a matter of mystery to others. He was a hard-headed man of business; he was indefatigable; he 'knew how to be complaisant and how and when to assert his independence'; he was judicious in the floating of Government loans; and he lived within his means. We may accept Mr. Coleridge's summary of his business career, and take his word for it that the rolling up of money went forward uneventfully enough. To the outsider there is a certain grimness in the spectacle. Who is master and who is slave? The two seem mixed in bitter conflict of some sort—such groans escape him now and then, and the lean, wire-drawn face, with the tight-closed lips and the anxious eyes, wears such an expression of nervous apprehension. Once, when he was driving with his old friend Colonel Crawford, he sat silent hour after hour, and the Colonel, reaching home, wrote in a fury to demand an explanation of 'this silent contempt', which in another would have demanded sword or pistol. 'It is too, too foolish', exclaimed poor Coutts; the truth was merely that 'my spirit's gone, and my mind worn and harras'd', and 'I am now rather an object of pity than resentment'.

But whatever secret anguish compelled the richest man in England to drive hour after hour in silence, there were also amenities and privileges attached to his state which lightened the office gloom and tinged the ledgers with radiance. The reader becomes aware of a curious note in the tone in which his correspondents address him. There is an intimate, agonized strain in all their

voices. His correspondents were some of the greatest people in the land; yet they wrote generally with their own hands, and often added the injunction: 'Burn this Letter the moment it is read'. . . . 'Name it not to my Lord', this particular document continues, 'or to any creature on earth'. For royal as they were, beautiful, highly gifted, they were all in straits for money; all came to Thomas Coutts; all approached him as suppliants and sinners beseeching his help and confessing their follies as if he were something between doctor and priest. He heard from Lady Chatham the story of her distress when the payment of Chatham's pension was delayed; he bestowed £10,000 upon Charles James Fox, and earned his effusive gratitude; the Royal Dukes laid their sad circumstances before him; Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, confessed her gambling losses, called him her dear friend and died in his debt. Lady Hester Stanhope thundered and growled melodiously enough from the top of Mount Lebanon. Naturally, then, Thomas Coutts had only to say what he wanted, and some very powerful people bestirred themselves to get it for him. He wanted introductions for his daughters among the French nobility; he wanted George the Fourth to bank with him; he wanted the King's leave to drive his carriage through St. James's Park. But he wanted some things that not even the Duchess of Devonshire could procure. He wanted health; he wanted a son-in-law.

There was, Mr. Coleridge says, 'a singular dearth of suitors for his daughters and his ducats'. Was it that Mrs. Coutts had in her housemaid days thrown soapsuds over Lord Dundonald? Or was it that the presence of madness in the Coutts family showed itself unmistakably in the frequent 'nervous complaints' of the three sisters? At any rate, Sophia, the youngest, was nineteen when she became engaged to Francis Burdett; and heiresses presumably should be wearing their coronets years before that. Then her two elder sisters pledged their affections suitably enough. But love always came among the Couttses wearing the mask of tragedy or comedy, or both together in grotesque combination. The two young men, thus singled out, against all advice and entreaty rushed the Falls of Schaffhausen in an open punt. Both were drowned. Two years later Susan recovered sufficiently to marry Lord Guilford, and after mourning for seven years Fanny accepted Lord Bute; but Lord Bute was a widower of fifty-six with nine children, and Lord

Guilford fell from his horse 'when in the act of presenting a basket of fruit to Miss Coutts', and so injured his spine that he languished in bodily suffering for years before, prematurely, he died.

But from all those impressions and turns of phrase which, more than any statement of facts, shape life in biographies as they do in reality, we are convinced that Thomas Coutts loved his daughters intensely and sincerely, pitying their sufferings, devising pleasures and comforts for them, and sometimes, perhaps, wishing to be assured that when all was said and done they were happy, which, upon the same evidence, it is easy to guess that they were not. Even in these days Sir Francis Burdett caused his father-in-law some anxiety. The following extract hints the reason of it:

Going to Piccadilly yesterday at two o'clock, I met Mr. Burdett. . . . I asked him where he was going . . . I asked him if he had been under any engagement to Mr. Whitefoord, upon which, to do him justice, he blushed—and, with great signs of astonishment, confessed that he had entirely forgot it, though he had particularly remembered it the day before . . . To us, *exact people*, these things seem strange.

Probably Mr. Coutts was not altogether surprised to find that a man who was capable of forgetting an engagement could defy the House of Commons, stand a siege in his house, be taken forth by Life Guards through a crowd shouting 'Burdett for ever!' and suffer imprisonment in the Tower. Later, Coutts had to insist that his son-in-law should leave his house; but on that occasion our sympathies are with the banker. Like most people, Sir Francis lost his temper, his manners, his humanity, and everything decent about him when he was in danger of losing a legacy. But for the present the legacies were secure, and the surface of life was splendid and serene. Mr. and Mrs. Coutts lived in the great house in Stratton Street; they travelled from one fine country seat to another, the guests of a Duke here, of an Earl there; their wealth increased and increased, and Thomas Coutts was consulted upon delicate matters by Prime Ministers and Kings. He acted as ambassador between the House of Hanover and the House of Stuart—almost equally to his delight, he transmitted winter petticoats from Paris to Devonshire House.

But the splendid surface had deep cracks in it, and when William the Fourth dined with the Couttses, Mrs. Coutts—so he declared—

would always whisper to him on the way downstairs, 'Sir, are you not George the Third's *father*?' 'I always answered in the affirmative,' said the King . . . 'there's no use contradicting women, young or old, eh?' She was losing her wits. For the last ten years of her life she was out of her mind. But old Coutts would have her lead the King down to dinner, and would tend her faithfully himself when doctors and daughters besought him to put her under control. He was a devoted husband.

At the same time he was a devoted lover. During the ten years that Mrs. Coutts was going from bad to worse and being tenderly cared for by her husband, he was lavishing horses, carriages, villas, sums in the 'Long Annuities', upon a young actress in Little Russell Street. The paradox has disturbed his biographers. Leaving to others the task of determining how far the relation between the old banker and the young woman was immoral, we must admit that we like him all the better for it; more, it seems to prove that he loved his wife. For the first time he hears the birds at dawn and notices the spring leaves. Like his Harriot, birds and leaves seem to him innocent and fresh.

You who can look to Heaven with so much pleasure and so pure a heart must have great pleasure in viewing such beautiful skies . . . eat light nourishing food—mutton roast and broiled is the best—porter is not good for you . . . I kiss the paper you are to look upon and beg you to kiss it just here. Your dear lips will then have touched what mine touch just now. . . . The estate of Otham, you see, I have enquired about. Your 3 p. ct. Consol and Long Annuity . . .

So it goes on from birds to flannel night-caps, from eternal devotion to profitable investments; but the strain that links together all these diverse notes is his recurring and constant adoration for Harriot's 'pure, innocent, honest, kind, affectionate heart'. It was a terrible blow to his daughters and sons-in-law to find that at his age he was capable of entertaining such illusions. When it came out that, four days after Mrs. Coutts was buried, the old gentleman of seventy-nine had hurried off to St. Pancras Church and married himself (illegally, as it turned out, by one of those misadventures which always beset the Coutts family when they were in love) to an actress of no birth and robust physique, the lamentations that rent the family in twain were bitter in the extreme. What would become

of his money? As they could not ask this openly, they took the more roundabout way of 'imputing to the servants' at Stratton Street that Mrs. Coutts was poisoning her husband and was in the habit of receiving men in her bedroom when half-undressed. Coutts replied to his daughters and his sons-in-law in bitter, agitated letters which make painful, though spirited, reading after a hundred years. How they tortured him! How they grudged him his happiness! How grateful he would have been for a word of sympathy! Still, he had his Harriot, and though she was only gone into the next room, he must write her a letter to say how he loves her and trusts her and begs her not to mind the spiteful things that his family say about her. 'Your constant, happy, and most affectionate husband' he signs himself, and she invokes 'My beloved Tom!' Indeed, Harriot deserved every penny she got, and we rejoice to think that she got them all. She was a generous woman. She was bountiful to her stepdaughters; she was always burying broken-down actors in luxury, and putting up marble tablets to their memories; and she married a Duke. But every year of her life she drove down to Little Russell Street, got out of her carriage, dismissed her servants, and walked along the dirty lane to have a look at the house where she had begun life as 'a poor little player child'. And once, long after Tom was dead, she dreamed of Tom, and noted on the flyleaf of her Prayer Book how he had come to her looking 'well, tranquil, and divine. He anxiously desired me to change my shoes', which was, no doubt, true to the life; but in the dream it was 'for fear of taking cold, as I had walked through waters to him', which somehow touches us as if Tom and Harriot had walked through bitter waters to rescue their little fragment of love from all that money.

## Four Figures

### *I. Cowper and Lady Austen*

IT happened, of course, many years ago, but there must have been something remarkable about the meeting, since people still like to bring it before their eyes. An elderly gentleman was looking out of his window in a village street in the summer of 1781 when he saw two ladies go into a draper's shop opposite. The look of one of them interested him very much, and he seems to have said so, for soon a meeting was arranged.

A quiet and solitary life that must have been, in which a gentleman stood in the morning looking out of the window, in which the sight of an attractive face was an event. Yet perhaps it was an event partly because it revived some half-forgotten but still pungent memories. For Cowper had not always looked at the world from the windows of a house in a village street. Time was when the sight of ladies of fashion had been familiar enough. In his younger days he had been very foolish. He had flirted and giggled; he had gone smartly dressed to Vauxhall and Marebone Gardens. He had taken his work at the Law Courts with a levity that alarmed his friends—for he had nothing whatever to live upon. He had fallen in love with his cousin Theodora Cowper. Indeed, he had been a thoughtless, wild young man. But suddenly in the heyday of his youth, in the midst of his gaiety, something terrible had happened. There lurked beneath that levity and perhaps inspired it a morbidity that sprang from some defect or person, a dread which made action, which made marriage, which made any public exhibition of himself insupportable. If goaded to it, and he was now committed to a public career in the House of Lords, he must fly, even into the jaws of death. Rather than take up his appointment he would drown himself. But a man sat on the quay when he came to the water's edge; some invisible hand mysteriously forced the laudanum from his lips when he tried to drink it; the knife which he pressed to his heart broke; and the garter with which he tried to hang himself from the bed-post let him fall. Cowper was condemned to live.

When, therefore, that July morning he looked out of the window at the ladies shopping, he had come through gulfs of despair, but he had reached at last not only the haven of a quiet country town, but a settled state of mind, a settled way of life. He was domesticated with Mrs. Unwin, a widow six years his elder. By letting him talk, and listening to his terrors and understanding them, she had brought him very wisely, like a mother, to something like peace of mind. They had lived side by side for many years in methodical monotony. They began the day by reading the Scriptures together; they then went to church; they parted to read or walk; they met after dinner to converse on religious topics or to sing hymns together; then again they walked if it were fine, or read and talked if it were wet, and at last the day ended with more hymns and more prayers. Such for many years had been the routine of Cowper's life with Mary Unwin. When his fingers found their way to a pen they traced the lines of a hymn, or if they wrote a letter it was to urge some misguided mortal, his brother John, for instance, at Cambridge, to seek salvation before it was too late. Yet this urgency was akin perhaps to the old leviety; it, too, was an attempt to ward off some terror, to propitiate some deep unrest that lurked at the bottom of his soul. Suddenly the peace was broken. One night in February, 1773, the enemy rose; it smote once and for ever. An awful voice called out to Cowper in a dream. It proclaimed that he was damned, that he was outcast, and he fell prostrate before it. After that he could not pray. When the others said grace at table, he took up his knife and fork as a sign that he had no right to join their prayers. Nobody, not even Mrs. Unwin, understood the terrific import of the dream. Nobody realized why he was unique; why he was singled out from all mankind and stood alone in his damnation. But that loneliness had a strange effect—since he was no longer capable of help or direction he was free. The Rev. John Newton could no longer guide his pen or inspire his muse. Since doom had been pronounced and damnation was inevitable, he might sport with hares, cultivate cucumbers, listen to village gossip, weave nets, make tables; all that could be hoped was to while away the dreadful years without the ability to enlighten others or to be helped himself. Never had Cowper written more enchantingly, more gaily, to his friends than now that he knew himself condemned. It was only at moments, when he wrote to Newton



or to Unwin, that the terror raised its horrid head above the surface and that he cried aloud: 'My days are spent in vanity. . . . Nature revives again; but a soul once slain lives no more.' For the most part, as he idled his time away in pleasant pastimes, as he looked with amusement at what passed in the street below, one might think him the happiest of men. There was Geary Ball going to the 'Royal Oak' to drink his dram—that happened as regularly as Cowper brushed his teeth; but behold—two ladies were going into the draper's shop opposite. That was an event.

One of the ladies he knew already—she was Mrs. Jones, the wife of a neighbouring clergyman. But the other was a stranger. She was arch and sprightly, with dark hair and round dark eyes. Though a widow—she had been the wife of a Sir Robert Austen—she was far from old and not at all solemn. When she talked, for she and Cowper were soon drinking tea together, 'she laughs and makes laugh, and keeps up a conversation without seeming to labour at it'. She was a lively, well-bred woman who had lived much in France, and, having seen much of the world, 'accounts it a great simpleton as it is'. Such were Cowper's first impressions of Ann Austen. Ann's first impressions of the queer couple who lived in the large house in the village street were even more enthusiastic. But that was natural—Ann was an enthusiast by nature. Moreover, though she had seen a great deal of the world and had a town house in Queen Anne Street, she had no friends or relations in that world much to her liking. Clifton Reynes, where her sister lived, was a rude, rough English village where the inhabitants broke into the house if a lady were left unprotected. Lady Austen was dissatisfied; she wanted society, but she also wanted to be settled and to be serious. Neither Clifton Reynes nor Queen Anne Street gave her altogether what she wanted. And then in the most opportune way—quite by chance—she met a refined, well-bred couple who were ready to appreciate what she had to give and ready to invite her to share the quiet pleasures of the countryside which were so dear to them. She could heighten those pleasures deliciously. She made the days seem full of movement and laughter. She organized picnics—they went to the Spinnie and ate their dinner in the root-house and drank their tea on the top of a wheelbarrow. And when autumn came and the evenings drew in, Ann Austen enlivened them too; she it was who stirred William to write a poem about a sofa, and

told him, just as he was sinking into one of his fits of melancholy, the story of John Gilpin, so that he leapt out of bed, shaking with laughter. But beneath her sprightliness they were glad to find that she was seriously inclined. She longed for peace and quietude, 'for with all that gaiety', Cowper wrote, 'she is a great thinker'.

And with all that melancholy, to paraphrase his words, Cowper was a man of the world. As he said himself, he was not by nature a recluse. He was no lean and solitary hermit. His limbs were sturdy; his cheeks were ruddy; he was growing plump. In his younger days he, too, had known the world, and provided, of course, that you have seen through it, there is something to be said for having known it. Cowper, at any rate, was a little proud of his gentle birth. Even at Olney he kept certain standards of gentility. He must have an elegant box for his snuff and silver buckles for his shoes; if he wanted a hat it must be 'not a round slouch, which I abhor, but a smart, well-cocked, fashionable affair'. His letters preserve this serenity, this good sense, this sidelong, arch humour embalmed in page after page of beautiful clear prose. As the post went only three times a week he had plenty of time to smooth out every little crease in daily life to perfection. He had time to tell how a farmer was thrown from his cart and one of the pet hares had escaped; Mr. Grenville had called; they had been caught in a shower and Mrs. Throckmorton had asked them to come into the house—some little thing of the kind happened every week very aptly for his purpose. Or if nothing happened and it was true that the days went by at Olney 'shod with felt', then he was able to let his mind play with rumours that reached him from the outer world. There was talk of flying. He would write a few pages on the subject of flying and its impiety; he would express his opinion of the wickedness, for Englishwomen at any rate, of painting the cheeks. He would discourse upon Homer and Virgil and perhaps attempt a few translations himself. And when the days were dark and even he could no longer trudge through the mud, he would open one of his favourite travellers and dream that he was voyaging with Cook or with Anson, for he travelled widely in imagination, though in body he moved no further than from Buckingham to Sussex and from Sussex back to Buckingham again.

His letters preserve what must have made the charm of his company. It is easy to see that his wit, his stories, his sedate, considerate

ways, must have made his morning visits—and he had got into the habit of visiting Lady Austen at eleven every morning—delightful. But there was more in his society than that—there was some charm, some peculiar fascination, that made it indispensable. His cousin Theodora had loved him—she still loved him anonymously; Mrs. Unwin loved him; and now Ann Austen was beginning to feel something stronger than friendship rise within her. That strain of intense and perhaps inhuman passion which rested with tremulous ecstasy like that of a hawk-moth over a flower, upon some tree, some hillside—did that not tensify the quiet of the country morning, and give to intercourse with him some keener interest than belonged to the society of other men? ‘The very stones in the garden walls are my intimate acquaintance’, he wrote. ‘Everything I see in the fields is to me an object, and I can look at the same rivulet, or at a handsome tree, every day of my life with new pleasure.’ It is this intensity of vision that gives his poetry, with all its moralising and didacticism, its unforgettable qualities. It is this that makes passages in *The Task* like clear windows let into the prosaic fabric of the rest. It was this that gave the edge and zest to his talk. Some finer vision suddenly seized and possessed him. It must have given to the long winter evenings, to the early morning visits, an indescribable combination of pathos and charm. Only, as Theodora could have warned Ann Austen, his passion was not for men and women; it was an abstract ardour; he was a man singularly without thought of sex.

Already early in their friendship Ann Austen had been warned. She adored her friends, and she expressed her adoration with the enthusiasm that was natural to her. At once Cowper wrote to her kindly but firmly admonishing her of the folly of her ways. ‘When we embellish a creature with colours taken from our fancy’, he wrote, ‘we make it an idol . . . and shall derive nothing from it but a painful conviction of our error.’ Ann read the letter, flew into a rage, and left the country in a huff. But the breach was soon healed; she worked him ruffles; he acknowledged them with a present of his book. Soon she had embraced Mary Unwin and was back again on more intimate terms than ever. In another month indeed, with such rapidity did her plans take effect, she had sold the lease of her town house, taken part of the vicarage next door to Cowper, and declared that she had now no home but Olney and no friends but Cowper and Mary Unwin. The door between the gardens was

opened; the two families dined together on alternate nights; William called Ann sister; and Ann called William brother. What arrangement could have been more idyllic? 'Lady Austen and we pass our days alternately at each other's château. In the morning I walk with one or other of the ladies, and in the afternoon wind thread', wrote Cowper, playfully comparing himself to Hercules and Samson. And then the evening came, the winter evening which he loved best, and he dreamt in the firelight and watched the shadows dance uncouthly and the sooty films play upon the bars until the lamp was brought, and in that level light he had out his netting, or wound silk, and then, perhaps, Ann sang to the harpsichord and Mary and William played battledore and shuttlecock together. Secure, innocent, peaceful, where then was that 'thistly sorrow' that grows inevitably, so Cowper said, beside human happiness? Where would discord come, if come it must? The danger lay perhaps with the women. It might be that Mary would notice one evening that Ann wore a lock of William's hair set in diamonds. She might find a poem to Ann in which he expressed more than a brotherly affection. She would grow jealous. For Mary Unwin was no country simpleton, she was a well-read woman with 'the manners of a Duchess'; she had nursed and consoled William for years before Ann came to flutter the 'still life' which they both loved best. Thus the two ladies would compete; discord would enter at that point. Cowper would be forced to choose between them.

But we are forgetting another presence at the innocent evening's entertainment. Ann might sing; Mary might play; the fire might burn brightly and the frost and the wind outside make the fireside calm all the sweeter. But there was a shadow among them. In that tranquil room a gulf opened. Cowper trod on the verge of an abyss. Whispers mingled with the singing, voices hissed in his ear words of doom and damnation. He was haled by a terrible voice to perdition. And then Ann Austen expected him to make love to her! Then Ann Austen wanted him to marry her! The thought was odious; it was indecent; it was intolerable. He wrote her another letter, a letter to which there could be no reply. In her bitterness Ann burnt it. She left Olney and no word ever passed between them again. The friendship was over.

And Cowper did not mind very much. Everybody was extremely kind to him. The Throckmortons gave him the key of their garden.

An anonymous friend—he never guessed her name—gave him fifty pounds a year. A cedar desk with silver handles was sent him by another friend who wished also to remain unknown. The kind people at Olney supplied him with almost too many tame hares. But if you are damned, if you are solitary, if you are cut off from God and man, what does human kindness avail? 'It is all vanity. . . . Nature revives again; but a soul once slain lives no more.' He sank from gloom to gloom, and died in misery.

As for Lady Austen, she married a Frenchman. She was happy—so people said.

## II. *Beau Brummell*

When Cowper, in the seclusion of Olney, was roused to anger by the thought of the Duchess of Devonshire and predicted a time when 'instead of a girdle there will be a rent, and instead of beauty, baldness', he was acknowledging the power of the lady whom he thought so despicable. Why, otherwise, should she haunt the damp solitudes of Olney? Why should the rustle of her silken skirts disturb those gloomy meditations? Undoubtedly the Duchess was a good haunter. Long after those words were written, when she was dead and buried beneath a tinsel coronet, her ghost mounted the stairs of a very different dwelling-place. An old man was sitting in his armchair at Caen. The door opened, and the servant announced, 'The Duchess of Devonshire'. Beau Brummell at once rose, went to the door and made a bow that would have graced the Court of St. James's. Only, unfortunately, there was nobody there. The cold air blew up the staircase of an inn. The Duchess was long dead, and Beau Brummell, in his old age and imbecility, was dreaming that he was back in London again giving a party. Cowper's curse had come true for both of them. The Duchess lay in her shroud, and Brummell, whose clothes had been the envy of kings, had now only one pair of much-mended trousers, which he hid as best he could under a tattered cloak. As for his hair, that had been shaved by order of the doctor.

But though Cowper's sour predictions had thus come to pass, both the Duchess and the dandy might claim that they had had their day. They had been great figures in their time. Of the two, perhaps Brummell might boast the more miraculous career. He had

no advantage of birth, and but little of fortune. His grandfather had let rooms in St. James's Street. He had only a moderate capital of thirty thousand pounds to begin with, and his beauty, of figure rather than of face, was marred by a broken nose. Yet without a single noble, important, or valuable action to his credit he cuts a figure; he stands for a symbol; his ghost walks among us still. The reason for this eminence is now a little difficult to determine. Skill of hand and nicety of judgment were his, of course, otherwise he would not have brought the art of tying neck-cloths to perfection. The story is, perhaps, too well known—how he drew his head far back and sunk his chin slowly down so that the cloth wrinkled in perfect symmetry, or if one wrinkle were too deep or too shallow, the cloth was thrown into a basket and the attempt renewed, while the Prince of Wales sat, hour after hour, watching. Yet skill of hand and nicety of judgment were not enough. Brummell owed his ascendancy to some curious combination of wit, of taste, of insolence, of independence—for he was never a toady—which it were too heavy-handed to call a philosophy of life, but served the purpose. At any rate, ever since he was the most popular boy at Eton, coolly jesting when they were for throwing a bargee into the river, 'My good fellows, don't send him into the river; the man is evidently in a high state of perspiration, and it almost amounts to a certainty that he will catch cold', he floated buoyantly and gaily and without apparent effort to the top of whatever society he found himself among. Even when he was a captain in the Tenth Hussars and so scandalously inattentive to duty that he only knew his troop by 'the very large blue nose' of one of the men, he was liked and tolerated. When he resigned his commission, for the regiment was to be sent to Manchester—and 'I really could not go—think, your Royal Highness, Manchester!'—he had only to set up house in Chesterfield Street to become the head of the most jealous and exclusive society of his time. For example, he was at Almack's one night talking to Lord ——. The Duchess of —— was there, escorting her young daughter, Lady Louisa. The Duchess caught sight of Mr. Brummell, and at once warned her daughter that if that gentleman near the door came and spoke to them she was to be careful to impress him favourably, 'for', and she sank her voice to a whisper, 'he is the celebrated Mr. Brummell'. Lady Louisa might well have wondered why a Mr. Brummell was celebrated, and why a Duke's

daughter need take care to impress a Mr. Brummell. And then, directly he began to move towards them, the reason of her mother's warning became apparent. The grace of his carriage was so astonishing; his bows were so exquisite. Everybody looked overdressed or badly dressed—some, indeed, looked positively dirty—beside him. His clothes seemed to melt into each other with the perfection of their cut and the quiet harmony of their colour. Without a single point of emphasis everything was distinguished—from his bow to the way he opened his snuff-box, with his left hand invariably. He was the personification of freshness and cleanliness and order. One could well believe that he had his chair brought into his dressing-room and was deposited at Almack's without letting a puff of wind disturb his curls or a spot of mud stain on his shoes. When he actually spoke to her, Lady Louisa would be at first enchanted—no one was more agreeable, more amusing, had a manner that was more flattering and enticing—and then she would be puzzled. It was quite possible that before the evening was out he would ask her to marry him, and yet his manner of doing it was such that the most ingenuous *débutante* could not believe that he meant it seriously. His odd grey eyes seemed to contradict his lips; they had a look in them which made the sincerity of his compliments very doubtful. And then he said very cutting things about other people. They were not exactly witty; they were certainly not profound; but they were so skilful, so adroit—they had a twist in them which made them slip into the mind and stay there when more important phrases were forgotten. He had downed the Regent himself with his dexterous 'Who's your fat friend?' and his method was the same with humbler people who snubbed him or bored him. 'Why, what could I do, my good fellow, but cut the connexion? I discovered that Lady Mary actually ate cabbage!'—so he explained to a friend his failure to marry a lady. And, again, when some dull citizen pestered him about his tour to the North, 'Which of the lakes do I admire?' he asked his valet. 'Windermere, sir.' 'Ah, yes—Windermere, so it is—Windermere.' That was his style, flickering, sneering, hovering on the verge of insolence, skimming the edge of nonsense, but always keeping within some curious mean, so that one knew the false Brummell story from the true by its exaggeration. Brummell could never have said, 'Wales, ring the bell', any more than he could have worn a brightly coloured waistcoat or a glaring necktie. That

'certain exquisite propriety' which Lord Byron remarked in his dress stamped his whole being, and made him appear cool, refined, and debonair among the gentlemen who talked only of sport, which Brummell detested, and smelt of the stable, which Brummell never visited. Lady Louisa might well be on tenter-hooks to impress Mr. Brummell favourably. Mr. Brummell's good opinion was of the utmost importance in the world of Lady Louisa.

And unless that world fell into ruins his rule seemed assured. Handsome, heartless, and cynical, the Beau seemed invulnerable. His taste was impeccable, his health admirable, and his figure as fine as ever. His rule had lasted many years and survived many vicissitudes. The French Revolution had passed over his head without disordering a single hair. Empires had risen and fallen while he experimented with the crease of a neck-cloth and criticized the cut of a coat. Now the battle of Waterloo had been fought and peace had come. The battle left him untouched; it was the peace that undid him. For some time past he had been winning and losing at the gaming-tables. Harriette Wilson had heard that he was ruined, and then, not without disappointment, that he was safe again. Now, with the armies disbanded, there was let loose upon London a horde of rough, ill-mannered men who had been fighting all those years and were determined to enjoy themselves. They flooded the gaming-houses. They played very high. Brummell was forced into competition. He lost and won and vowed never to play again, and then he did play again. At last his remaining ten thousand pounds was gone. He borrowed until he could borrow no more. And finally, to crown the loss of so many thousands, he lost the six-penny-bit with a hole in it which had always brought him good luck. He gave it by mistake to a hackney coachman: that rascal Rothschild got hold of it, he said, and that was the end of his luck. Such was his own account of the affair—other people put a less innocent interpretation on the matter. At any rate there came a day, May 16th, 1816, to be precise—it was a day upon which everything was precise—when he dined alone off a cold fowl and a bottle of claret at Waiter's, attended the opera, and then took coach for Dover. He drove rapidly all through the night and reached Calais the day after. He never set foot in England again.

And now a curious process of disintegration set in. The peculiar and highly artificial society of London had acted as a preservative;



it had kept him in being; it had concentrated him into one single gem. Now that the pressure was removed, the odds and ends, so trifling separately, so brilliant in combination, which had made up the being of the Beau, fell asunder and revealed what lay beneath. At first his lustre seemed undiminished. His old friends crossed the water to see him and made a point of standing him a dinner and leaving a little present behind them at his bankers. He held his usual levee at his lodgings; he spent the usual hours washing and dressing; he rubbed his teeth with a red root, tweezed out hairs with a silver tweezer, tied his cravat to admiration, and issued at four precisely as perfectly equipped as if the Rue Royale had been St. James's Street and the Prince himself had hung upon his arm. But the Rue Royale was not St. James's Street; the old French Countess who spat on the floor was not the Duchess of Devonshire; the good bourgeois who pressed him to dine off goose at four was not Lord Alvanley; and though he soon won for himself the title of *Roi de Calais*, and was known to workmen as 'George, ring the bell', the praise was gross, the society coarse, and the amusements of Calais very slender. The Beau had to fall back upon the resources of his own mind. These might have been considerable. According to Lady Hester Stanhope, he might have been, had he chosen, a very clever man; and when she told him so, the Beau admitted that he had wasted his talents because a dandy's way of life was the only one 'which could place him in a prominent light, and enable him to separate himself from the ordinary herd of men, whom he held in considerable contempt'. That way of life allowed of verse-making—his verses, called 'The Butterfly's Funeral', were much admired; and of singing; and of some dexterity with the pencil. But now, when the summer days were so long and so empty, he found that such accomplishments hardly served to while away the time. He tried to occupy himself with writing his memoirs; he bought a screen and spent hours pasting it with pictures of great men and beautiful ladies whose virtues and frailties were symbolized by hyenas, by wasps, by profusions of cupids, fitted together with extraordinary skill; he collected Buhl furniture; he wrote letters in a curiously elegant and elaborate style to ladies. But these occupations palled. The resources of his mind had been whittled away in the course of years; now they failed him. And then the crumbling process went a little farther, and another organ was laid bare—the

heart. He who played at love all these years and kept so adroitly beyond the range of passion, now made violent advances to girls who were young enough to be his daughters. He wrote such passionate letters to Mademoiselle Ellen of Caen that she did not know whether to laugh or to be angry. She was angry, and the Beau, who had tyrannized over the daughters of Dukes, prostrated himself before her in despair. But it was too late—the heart after all these years was not a very engaging object even to a simple country girl, and he seems at last to have lavished his affections upon animals. He mourned his terrier Vick for three weeks; he had a friendship with a mouse; he became the champion of all the neglected cats and starving dogs in Caen. Indeed, he said to a lady that if a man and a dog were drowning in the same pond he would prefer to save the dog—if, that is, there were nobody looking. But he was still persuaded that everybody was looking; and his immense regard for appearances gave him a certain stoical endurance. Thus, when paralysis struck him at dinner he left the table without a sign; sunk deep in debt as he was, he still picked his way over the cobbles on the points of his toes to preserve his shoes, and when the terrible day came and he was thrown into prison he won the admiration of murderers and thieves by appearing among them as cool and courteous as if about to pay a morning call. But if he were to continue to act his part, it was essential that he should be supported—he must have a sufficiency of boot polish, gallons of eau-de-Cologne, and three changes of linen every day. His expenditure upon these items was enormous. Generous as his old friends were, and persistently as he supplicated them, there came a time when they could be squeezed no longer. It was decreed that he was to content himself with one change of linen daily, and his allowance was to admit of necessities only. But how could a Brummell exist upon necessities only? The demand was absurd. Soon afterwards he showed his sense of the gravity of the situation by mounting a black silk neck-cloth. Black silk neck-cloths had always been his aversion. It was a signal of despair, a sign that the end was in sight. After that everything that had supported him and kept him in being dissolved. His self-respect vanished. He would dine with anyone who would pay the bill. His memory weakened and he told the same story over and over again till even the burghers of Caen were bored. Then his manners degenerated. His extreme cleanliness lapsed into careless-

ness, and then into positive filth. People objected to his presence in the dining-room of the hotel. Then his mind went—he thought that the Duchess of Devonshire was coming up the stairs when it was only the wind. At last but one passion remained intact among the crumbled debris of so many—an immense greed. To buy Rheims biscuits he sacrificed the greatest treasure that remained to him—he sold his snuff-box. And then nothing was left but a heap of disagreeables, a mass of corruption, a senile and disgusting old man fit only for the charity of nuns and the protection of an asylum. There the clergyman begged him to pray. ‘“I do try”’, he said, but he added something which made me doubt whether he understood me.’ Certainly, he would try; for the clergyman wished it and he had always been polite. He had been polite to thieves and to duchesses and to God Himself. But it was no use trying any longer. He could believe in nothing now except a hot fire, sweet biscuits, and another cup of coffee if he asked for it. And so there was nothing for it but that the Beau who had been compact of grace and sweetness should be shuffled into the grave like any other ill-dressed, ill-bred, unneeded old man. Still, one must remember that Byron, in his moments of dandyism, ‘always pronounced the name of Brummell with a mingled emotion of respect and jealousy’.

[NOTE.—Mr. Berry of St. James’s Street has courteously drawn my attention to the fact that Beau Brummell certainly visited England in 1822. He came to the famous wine-shop on July 26th, 1822, and was weighed as usual. His weight was then 10 stones 13 pounds. On the previous occasion, July 6th, 1815, his weight was 12 stones 10 pounds. Mr. Berry adds that there is no record of his coming after 1822.]

### III. *Mary Wollstonecraft*

Great wars are strangely intermittent in their effects. The French Revolution took some people and tore them asunder; others it passed over without disturbing a hair of their heads. Jane Austen, it is said, never mentioned it; Charles Lamb ignored it; Beau Brummell never gave the matter a thought. But to Wordsworth and to Godwin it was the dawn; unmistakably they saw.

France standing on the top of golden hours,  
And human nature seeming born again.

Thus it would be easy for a picturesque historian to lay side by side the most glaring contrasts—here in Chesterfield Street was Beau Brummell letting his chin fall carefully upon his cravat and discussing in a tone studiously free from vulgar emphasis the proper cut of the lapel of a coat; and here in Somers Town was a party of ill-dressed, excited young men, one with a head too big for his body and a nose too long for his face, holding forth day by day over the tea-cups upon human perfectibility, ideal unity, and the rights of man. There was also a woman present with very bright eyes and a very eager tongue, and the young men, who had middle-class names, like Barlow and Holcroft and Godwin, called her simply ‘Wollstonecraft’, as if it did not matter whether she were married or unmarried, as if she were a young man like themselves.

Such glaring discords among intelligent people—for Charles Lamb and Godwin, Jane Austen and Mary Wollstonecraft were all highly intelligent—suggest how much influence circumstances have upon opinions. If Godwin had been brought up in the precincts of the Temple and had drunk deep of antiquity and old letters at Christ’s Hospital, he might never have cared a straw for the future of man and his rights in general. If Jane Austen had lain as a child on the landing to prevent her father from thrashing her mother, her soul might have burnt with such a passion against tyranny that all her novels might have been consumed in one cry for justice.

Such had been Mary Wollstonecraft’s first experience of the joys of married life. And then her sister Everina had been married miserably and had bitten her wedding ring to pieces in the coach. Her brother had been a burden on her; her father’s farm had failed, and in order to start that disreputable man with the red face and the violent temper and the dirty hair in life again she had gone into bondage among the aristocracy as a governess—in short, she had never known what happiness was, and, in its default, had fabricated a creed fitted to meet the sordid misery of real human life. The staple of her doctrine was that nothing mattered save independence. ‘Every obligation we receive from our fellow-creatures is a new shackle, takes from our native freedom, and debases the mind.’ Independence was the first necessity for a woman; not grace or charm, but energy and courage and the power to put her will into effect, were her necessary qualities. It was her highest

boast to be able to say, 'I never yet resolved to do anything of consequence that I did not adhere readily to it'. Certainly Mary could say this with truth. When she was a little more than thirty she could look back upon a series of actions which she had carried out in the teeth of opposition. She had taken a house by prodigious efforts for her friend Fanny, only to find that Fanny's mind was changed and she did not want a house after all. She had started a school. She had persuaded Fanny into marrying Mr. Skeys. She had thrown up her school and gone to Lisbon alone to nurse Fanny when she died. On the voyage back she had forced the captain of the ship to rescue a wrecked French vessel by threatening to expose him if he refused. And when, overcome by a passion for Fuseli, she declared her wish to live with him and been refused flatly by his wife, she had put her principle of decisive action instantly into effect, and had gone to Paris determined to make her living by her pen.

The revolution thus was not merely an event that had happened outside her; it was an active agent in her own blood. She had been in revolt all her life—against tyranny, against law, against convention. The reformer's love of humanity, which has so much of hatred in it as well as love, fermented within her. The outbreak of revolution in France, expressed some of her deepest theories and convictions, and she dashed off in the heat of that extraordinary moment those two eloquent and daring books—the *Reply to Burke* and the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which are so true that they seem now to contain nothing new in them—their originality has become our commonplace. But when she was in Paris lodging by herself in a great house, and saw with her own eyes the King whom she despised driving past surrounded by National Guards and holding himself with greater dignity than she expected, then, 'I can scarcely tell you why', the tears came to her eyes. 'I am going to bed', the letter ended, 'and, for the first time in my life, I cannot put out the candle.' Things were not so simple after all. She could not understand even her own feelings. She saw the most cherished of her convictions put into practice—and her eyes filled with tears. She had won fame and independence and the right to live her own life—and she wanted something different. 'I do not want to be loved like a goddess', she wrote, 'but I wish to be necessary to you.' For Imlay, the fascinating American to whom her letter was ad-

dressed, had been very good to her. Indeed, she had fallen passionately in love with him. But it was one of her theories that love should be free—‘that mutual affection was marriage and that the marriage tie should not bind after the death of love, if love should die’. And yet at the same time that she wanted freedom she wanted certainty. ‘I like the word affection’, she wrote, ‘because it signifies something habitual.’

The conflict of all these contradictions shows itself in her face, at once so resolute and so dreamy, so sensual and so intelligent, and beautiful into the bargain with its great coils of hair and the large bright eyes that Southey thought the most expressive he had ever seen. The life of such a woman was bound to be tempestuous. Every day she made theories by which life should be lived; and every day she came smack against the rock of other people’s prejudices. Every day too—for she was no pedant, no cold-blooded theorist—something was born in her that thrust aside her theories and forced her to model them afresh. She acted upon her theory that she had no legal claim upon Imlay; she refused to marry him; but when he left her alone week after week with the child she had borne him her agony was unendurable.

Thus distracted, thus puzzling even to herself, the plausible and treacherous Imlay cannot be altogether blamed for failing to follow the rapidity of her changes and the alternate reason and unreason of her moods. Even friends whose liking was impartial were disturbed by her discrepancies. Mary had a passionate, an exuberant, love of Nature, and yet one night when the colours in the sky were so exquisite that Madeleine Schweizer could not help saying to her, ‘Come, Mary—come, nature-lover—and enjoy this wonderful spectacle—this constant transition from colour to colour’, Mary never took her eyes off the Baron de Wolzogen. ‘I must confess’, wrote Madame Schweizer, ‘that this erotic absorption made such a disagreeable impression on me, that all my pleasure vanished.’ But if the sentimental Swiss was disconcerted by Mary’s sensuality, Imlay, the shrewd man of business, was exasperated by her intelligence. Whenever he saw her he yielded to her charm, but then her quickness, her penetration, her uncompromising idealism harassed him. She saw through his excuses; she met all his reasons; she was even capable of managing his business. There was no peace with her—he must be off again. And then her letters followed him,

torturing him with their sincerity and their insight. They were so outspoken; they pleaded so passionately to be told the truth; they showed such a contempt for soap and alum and wealth and comfort; they repeated, as he suspected, so truthfully that he had only to say the word, 'and you shall never hear of me more', that he could not endure it. Tickling minnows he had hooked a dolphin, and the creature rushed him through the waters till he was dizzy and only wanted to escape. After all, though he had played at theory-making too, he was a business-man, he depended upon soap and alum; 'the secondary pleasures of life', he had to admit, 'are very necessary to my comfort'. And among them was one that for ever evaded Mary's jealous scrutiny. Was it business, was it politics, was it a woman, that perpetually took him away from her? He shilled and shallied; he was very charming when they met; then he disappeared again. Exasperated at last, and half-insane with suspicion, she forced the truth from the cook. A little actress in a strolling company was his mistress, she learnt. True to her own creed of decisive action, Mary at once soaked her skirts so that she might sink unflinching, and threw herself from Putney Bridge. But she was rescued; after unspeakable agony she recovered, and then her 'unconquerable greatness of mind', her girlish creed of independence, asserted itself again, and she determined to make another bid for happiness and to earn her living without taking a penny from Imlay for herself or their child.

It was in this crisis that she again saw Godwin, the little man with the big head, whom she had met when the French Revolution was making the young men in Somers Town think that a new world was being born. She met him—but that is a euphemism, for in fact Mary Wollstonecraft actually visited him in his own house. Was it the effect of the French Revolution? Was it the blood she had seen spilt on the pavement and the cries of the furious crowd that had rung in her ears that made it seem a matter of no importance whether she put on her cloak and went to visit Godwin in Somers Town, or waited in Judd Street West for Godwin to come to her? And what strange upheaval of human life was it that inspired that curious man, who was so queer a mixture of meanness and magnanimity, of coldness and deep feeling—for the memoir of his wife could not have been written without unusual depth of heart—to hold the view that she did right—that he respected Mary for

trampling upon the idiotic convention by which women's lives were tied down? He held the most extraordinary views on many subjects, and upon the relations of the sexes in particular. He thought that reason should influence even the love between men and women. He thought that there was something spiritual in their relationship. He had written that 'marriage is a law, and the worst of all laws . . . marriage is an affair of property, and the worst of all properties'. He held the belief that if two people of the opposite sex like each other, they should live together without any ceremony, or, for living together is apt to blunt love, twenty doors off, say, in the same street. And he went further; he said that if another man liked your wife 'this will create no difficulty. We may all enjoy her conversation, and we shall all be wise enough to consider the sensual intercourse a very trivial object.' True, when he wrote those words he had never been in love; now for the first time he was to experience that sensation. It came very quietly and naturally, growing 'with equal advances in the mind of each' from those talks in Somers Town, from those discussions upon everything under the sun which they held so improperly alone in his rooms. 'It was friendship melting into love . . .', he wrote. 'When, in the course of things, the disclosure came, there was nothing in a manner for either party to disclose to the other.' Certainly they were in agreement upon the most essential points; they were both of opinion, for instance, that marriage was unnecessary. They would continue to live apart. Only when Nature again intervened, and Mary found herself with child, was it worth while to lose valued friends, she asked, for the sake of a theory? She thought not, and they were married. And then that other theory—that it is best for husband and wife to live apart—was not that also incompatible with other feelings that were coming to birth in her? 'A husband is a convenient part of the furniture of the house', she wrote. Indeed, she discovered that she was passionately domestic. Why not, then, revise that theory too, and share the same roof. Godwin should have a room some doors off to work in; and they should dine out separately if they liked—their work, their friends, should be separate. Thus they settled it, and the plan worked admirably. The arrangement combined 'the novelty and lively sensation of a visit with the more delicious and heart-felt pleasures of domestic life'. Mary admitted that she was happy; Godwin confessed that, after all one's



philosophy, it was 'extremely gratifying' to find that 'there is some one who takes an interest in one's happiness'. All sorts of powers and emotions were liberated in Mary by her new satisfaction. Trifles gave her an exquisite pleasure—the sight of Godwin and Imlay's child playing together; the thought of their own child who was to be born; a day's jaunt into the country. One day, meeting Imlay in the New Road, she greeted him without bitterness. But, as Godwin wrote, 'Ours is not an idle happiness, a paradise of selfish and transitory pleasures'. No, it too was an experiment, as Mary's life had been an experiment from the start, an attempt to make human conventions conform more closely to human needs. And their marriage was only a beginning; all sorts of things were to follow after. Mary was going to have a child. She was going to write a book to be called *The Wrongs of Women*. She was going to reform education. She was going to come down to dinner the day after her child was born. She was going to employ a midwife and not a doctor at her confinement—but that experiment was her last. She died in childbirth. She whose sense of her own existence was so intense, who had cried out even in her misery, 'I cannot bear to think of being no more—of losing myself—nay, it appears to me impossible that I should cease to exist', died at the age of thirty-six. But she has her revenge. Many millions have died and been forgotten in the hundred and thirty years that have passed since she was buried; and yet as we read her letters and listen to her arguments and consider her experiments, above all, that most fruitful experiment, her relation with Godwin, and realize the high-handed and hot-blooded manner in which she cut her way to the quick of life, one form of immortality is hers undoubtedly: she is alive and active, she argues and experiments, we hear her voice and trace her influence even now among the living.

#### IV. *Dorothy Wordsworth*

Two highly incongruous travellers, Mary Wollstonecraft and Dorothy Wordsworth, followed close upon each other's footsteps. Mary was in Altona on the Elbe in 1795 with her baby; three years later Dorothy came there with her brother and Coleridge. Both kept a record of their travels; both saw the same places, but the eyes with which they saw them were very different. Whatever

Mary saw served to start her mind upon some theory, upon the effect of government, upon the state of the people, upon the mystery of her own soul. The beat of the oars on the waves made her ask, 'Life, what are you? Where goes this breath? This *I* so much alive? In what element will it mix, giving and receiving fresh energy?' And sometimes she forgot to look at the sunset and looked instead at the Baron Wolzogen. Dorothy, on the other hand, noted what was before her accurately, literally, and with prosaic precision. 'The walk very pleasing between Hamburg and Altona. A large piece of ground planted with trees, and intersected by gravel walks. . . . The ground on the opposite side of the Elbe appears marshy.' Dorothy never railed against 'the cloven hoof of despotism'. Dorothy never asked 'men's questions' about exports and imports; Dorothy never confused her own soul with the sky. This '*I* so much alive' was ruthlessly subordinated to the trees and the grass. For if she let 'I' and its rights and its wrongs and its passions and its suffering get between her and the object, she would be calling the moon 'the Queen of the Night'; she would be talking of dawn's 'orient beams'; she would be soaring into reveries and rhapsodies and forgetting to find the exact phrase for the ripple of moonlight upon the lake. It was like 'herrings in the water'—she could not have said that if she had been thinking about herself. So while Mary dashed her head against wall after wall, and cried out, 'Surely something resides in this heart that is not perishable—and life is more than a dream', Dorothy went on methodically at Alfoxden noting the approach of spring. 'The sloe in blossom, the hawthorn green, the larches in the park changed from black to green, in two or three days.' And next day, April 14th, 1798, 'the evening very stormy, so we staid indoors. Mary Wollstonecraft's life, &c., came'. And the day after they walked in the squire's grounds and noticed that 'Nature was very successfully striving to make beautiful what art had deformed—ruins, hermitages, &c., &c.'. There is no reference to Mary Wollstonecraft; it seems as if her life and all its storms had been swept away in one of those compendious *et ceteras*, and yet the next sentence reads like an unconscious comment. 'Happily we cannot shape the huge hills, or carve out the valleys according to our fancy.' No, we cannot reform, we must not rebel; we can only accept and try to understand the message of Nature. And so the notes go on.

Spring passed; summer came; summer turned to autumn; it was winter, and then again the sloes were in blossom and the hawthorns green and spring had come. But it was spring in the North now, and Dorothy was living alone with her brother in a small cottage at Grasmere in the midst of the hills. Now after the hardships and separations of youth they were together under their own roof; now they could address themselves undisturbed to the absorbing occupation of living in the heart of Nature and trying, day by day, to read her meaning. They had money enough at last to let them live together without the need of earning a penny. No family duties or professional tasks distracted them. Dorothy could ramble all day on the hills and sit up talking to Coleridge all night without being scolded by her aunt for unwomanly behaviour. The hours were theirs from sunrise to sunset, and could be altered to suit the season. If it was fine, there was no need to come in; if it was wet, there was no need to get up. One could go to bed at any hour. One could let the dinner cool if the cuckoo were shouting on the hill and William had not found the exact epithet he wanted. Sunday was a day like any other. Custom, convention, everything was subordinated to the absorbing, exacting, exhausting task of living in the heart of Nature and writing poetry. For exhausting it was. William would make his head ache in the effort to find the right word. He would go on hammering at a poem until Dorothy was afraid to suggest an alteration. A chance phrase of hers would run in his head and make it impossible for him to get back into the proper mood. He would come down to breakfast and sit 'with his shirt neck unbuttoned, and his waistcoat open', writing a poem on a Butterfly which some story of hers had suggested, and he would eat nothing, and then he would begin altering the poem and again would be exhausted.

It is strange how vividly all this is brought before us, considering that the diary is made up of brief notes such as any quiet woman might make of her garden's changes and her brother's moods and the progress of the seasons. It was warm and mild, she notes, after a day of rain. She met a cow in a field. 'The cow looked at me, and I looked at the cow, and whenever I stirred the cow gave over eating.' She met an old man who walked with two sticks—for days on end she met nothing more out of the way than a cow eating and an old man walking. And her motives for writing are common enough—'because I will not quarrel with myself, and because I

shall give William pleasure by it when he comes home again'. It is only gradually that the difference between this rough notebook and others discloses itself; only by degrees that the brief notes unfurl in the mind and open a whole landscape before us, that the plain statement proves to be aimed so directly at the object that if we look exactly along the line that it points we shall see precisely what she saw. 'The moonlight lay upon the hills like snow.' 'The air was become still, the lake of a bright slate colour, the hills darkening. The bays shot into the low fading shores. Sheep resting. All things quiet.' 'There was no one waterfall above another—it was the sound of waters in the air—the voice of the air.' Even in such brief notes one feels the suggestive power which is the gift of the poet rather than of the naturalist, the power which, taking only the simplest facts, so orders them that the whole scene comes before us, heightened and composed, the lake in its quiet, the hills in their splendour. Yet she was no descriptive writer in the usual sense. Her first concern was to be truthful—grace and symmetry must be made subordinate to truth. But then truth is sought because to falsify the look of the stir of the breeze on the lake is to tamper with the spirit which inspires appearances. It is that spirit which goads her and urges her and keeps her faculties for ever on the stretch. A sight or a sound would not let her be till she had traced her perception along its course and fixed it in words, though they might be bald, or in an image, though it might be angular. Nature was a stern task-mistress. The exact prosaic detail must be rendered as well as the vast and visionary outline. Even when the distant hills trembled before her in the glory of a dream she must note with literal accuracy 'the glittering silver line on the ridge of the backs of the sheep', or remark how 'the crows at a little distance from us became white as silver as they flew in the sunshine, and when they went still further, they looked like shapes of water passing over the green fields'. Always trained and in use, her powers of observation became in time so expert and so acute that a day's walk stored her mind's eye with a vast assembly of curious objects to be sorted at leisure. How strange the sheep looked mixed with the soldiers at Dumbarton Castle! For some reason the sheep looked their real size, but the soldiers looked like puppets. And then the movements of the sheep were so natural and fearless, and the motion of the dwarf soldiers was so restless and apparently without meaning. It was extremely

queer. Or lying in bed she would look up at the ceiling and think how the varnished beams were 'as glossy as black rocks on a sunny day cased in ice'. Yes, they

crossed each other in almost as intricate and fantastic a manner as I have seen the underboughs of a large beech-tree withered by the depth of the shade above. . . . It was like what I should suppose an underground cave or temple to be, with a dripping or moist roof, and the moonlight entering in upon it by some means or other, and yet the colours were more like melted gems. I lay looking up till the light of the fire faded away. . . . I did not sleep much.

Indeed, she scarcely seemed to shut her eyes. They looked and they looked, urged on not only by an indefatigable curiosity but also by reverence, as if some secret of the utmost importance lay hidden beneath the surface. Her pen sometimes stammers with the intensity of the emotion that she controlled, as De Quincey said that her tongue stammered with the conflict between her ardour and her shyness when she spoke. But controlled she was. Emotional and impulsive by nature, her eyes 'wild and starting', tormented by feelings which almost mastered her, still she must control, still she must repress, or she would fail in her task—she would cease to see. But if one subdued oneself, and resigned one's private agitations, then, as if in reward, Nature would bestow an exquisite satisfaction. 'Rydale was very beautiful, with spear-shaped streaks of polished steel. . . . It calls home the heart to quietness. I had been very melancholy', she wrote. For did not Coleridge come walking over the hills and tap at the cottage door late at night—did she not carry a letter from Coleridge hidden safe in her bosom?

Thus giving to Nature, thus receiving from Nature, it seemed, as the arduous and ascetic days went by, that Nature and Dorothy had grown together in perfect sympathy—a sympathy not cold or vegetable or inhuman because at the core of it burnt that other love for 'my beloved', her brother, who was indeed its heart and inspiration. William and Nature and Dorothy herself, were they not one being? Did they not compose a trinity, self-contained and self-sufficient and independent whether indoors or out? They sit indoors. It was

about ten o'clock and a quiet night. The fire flickers and the

watch ticks. I hear nothing but the breathing of my Beloved as he now and then pushes his book forward, and turns over a leaf. And now it is an April day, and they take the old cloak and lie in John's grove out of doors together.

William heard me breathing, and rustling now and then, but we both lay still and unseen by one another. He thought that it would be sweet thus to lie in the grave, to hear the peaceful sounds of the earth, and just to know that our dear friends were near. The lake was still; there was a boat out.

It was a strange love, profound, almost dumb, as if brother and sister had grown together and shared not the speech but the mood, so that they hardly knew which felt, which spoke, which saw the daffodils of the sleeping city; only Dorothy stored the mood in prose, and later William came and bathed in it and made it into poetry. But one could not act without the other. They must feel, they must think, they must be together. So now, when they had lain out on the hillside they would rise and go home and make tea, and Dorothy would write to Coleridge, and they would sow the scarlet beans together, and William would work at his 'Leech Gatherer', and Dorothy would copy the lines for him. Rapt but controlled, free yet strictly ordered, the homely narrative moves naturally from ecstasy on the hills to baking bread and ironing linen and fetching William his supper in the cottage.

The cottage, though its garden ran up into the fells, was on the high road. Through her parlour window Dorothy looked out and saw whoever might be passing—a tall beggar woman perhaps with her baby on her back; an old soldier; a coroneted landau with touring ladies peering inquisitively inside. The rich and the great she would let pass—they interested her no more than cathedrals or picture galleries or great cities; but she could never see a beggar at the door without asking him in and questioning him closely. Where had he been? What had he seen? How many children had he? She searched into the lives of the poor as if they held in them the same secret as the hills. A tramp eating cold bacon over the kitchen fire might have been a starry night, so closely she watched him; so clearly she noted how his old coat was patched 'with three bell-shaped patches of darker blue behind, where the buttons had been', how his beard of a fortnight's growth was like 'grey *plush*'. And then as they rambled on with their tales of seafaring and the

press-gang and the Marquis of Granby, she never failed to capture the one phrase that sounds on in the mind after the story is forgotten, 'What, you are stepping westward?' 'To be sure there is great promise for virgins in Heaven.' 'She could trip lightly by the graves of those who died when they were young.' The poor had their poetry as the hills had theirs. But it was out of doors, on the road or on the moor, not in the cottage parlour, that her imagination had freest play. Her happiest moments were passed tramping beside a jibbing horse on a wet Scottish road without certainty of bed or supper. All she knew was that there was some sight ahead, some grove of trees to be noted, some waterfall to be inquired into. On they tramped hour after hour in silence for the most part, though Coleridge, who was of the party, would suddenly begin to debate aloud the true meaning of the words majestic, sublime, and grand. They had to trudge on foot because the horse had thrown the car over a bank and the harness was only mended with string and pocket-handkerchiefs. They were hungry, too, because Wordsworth had dropped the chicken and the bread into the lake, and they had nothing else for dinner. They were uncertain of the way, and did not know where they would find lodging: all they knew was that there was a waterfall ahead. At last Coleridge could stand it no longer. He had rheumatism in the joints; the Irish jaunting car provided no shelter from the weather; his companions were silent and absorbed. He left them. But William and Dorothy tramped on. They looked like tramps themselves. Dorothy's cheeks were brown as a gipsy's, her clothes were shabby, her gait was rapid and ungainly. But still she was indefatigable; her eye never failed her; she noticed everything. At last they reached the waterfall. And then all Dorothy's powers fell upon it. She searched out its character, she noted its resemblances, she defined its differences, with all the ardour of a discoverer, with all the exactness of a naturalist, with all the rapture of a lover. She possessed it at last—she had laid it up in her mind for ever. It had become one of those 'inner visions' which she could call to mind at any time in their distinctness and in their particularity. It would come back to her long years afterwards when she was old and her mind had failed her; it would come back stilled and heightened and mixed with all the happiest memories of her past—with the thought of Racedown and Alfoxden and Coleridge reading 'Christabel', and her beloved,

her brother William. It would bring with it what no human being could give, what no human relation could offer—consolation and quiet. If, then, the passionate cry of Mary Wollstonecraft had reached her ears—‘Surely something resides in this heart that is not perishable—and life is more than a dream’—she would have had no doubt whatever as to her answer. She would have said quite simply, ‘We looked about us, and felt that we were happy’.



## Jones and Wilkinson<sup>1</sup>

WHETHER Jones should come before Wilkinson or Wilkinson before Jones is not a matter likely to agitate many breasts at the present moment, seeing that more than a hundred and fifty years have rolled over the gentlemen in question and diminished a lustre which, even in their own time, round about the year 1750, was not very bright. The Rev. Dr. Wilkinson might indeed claim precedence by virtue of his office. He was His Majesty's Chaplain of the Savoy and Chaplain also to his late Royal Highness, Frederick Prince of Wales. But then Dr. Wilkinson was transported. Captain James Jones might assert that, as Captain of His Majesty's third regiment of Guards with a residence by virtue of his office in Savoy Square, his social position was equal to the Doctor's. But Captain Jones had to seclude himself beyond the reach of the law at Mortlake. What, however, renders these comparisons peculiarly odious is the fact that the Captain and the Doctor were boon companions whose tastes were congenial, whose incomes were insufficient, whose wives drank tea together, and whose houses in the Savoy were not two hundred yards apart. Dr. Wilkinson, for all his sacred offices (he was Rector of Coyty in Glamorgan, stipendiary curate of Wise in Kent, and, through Lord Galway, had the right to 'open plaister-pits in the honour of Pontefract'), was a convivial spirit who cut a splendid figure in the pulpit, preached and read prayers in a voice that was clear, strong, and sonorous so that many a lady of fashion never 'missed her pew near the pulpit', and persons of title remembered him many years after misfortune had removed the handsome preacher from their sight.

Captain Jones shared many of his friend's qualities. He was vivacious, witty, and generous, well made and elegant in person, and, if he was not quite as handsome as the doctor, he was perhaps rather his superior in intellect. Compare them as we may, however, there can be little doubt that the gifts and tastes of both gentlemen were better adapted for pleasure than for labour, for society than for solitude, for the hazards and pleasures of the table rather than for the rigours of religion and war. It was the gaming-

<sup>1</sup> Drawn from the *Memoirs of Tate Wilkinson*, 4 vols., 1790

table that seduced Captain Jones, and here, alas, his gifts and graces stood him in little stead. His affairs became more and more hopelessly embarrassed, so that shortly, instead of being able to take his walks at large, he was forced to limit them to the precincts of St. James's, where, by ancient prerogative, such unfortunates as he were free from the attentions of the bailiffs.

To so gregarious a spirit the confinement was irksome. His only resource, indeed, was to get into talk with any such 'park-saunterers' as misfortunes like his own had driven to perambulate the Park, or, when the weather allowed, to bask and loiter and gossip on its benches. As chance would have it (and the Captain was a devotee of that goddess) he found himself one day resting on the same bench with an elderly gentleman of military aspect and stern demeanor, whose ill-temper the wit and humour which all allowed to Captain Jones presumably beguiled, so that whenever the Captain appeared in the Park, the old man sought his company, and they passed the time until dinner very pleasantly in talk. On no occasion, however, did the General—for it appeared that the name of this morose old man was General Skelton—ask Captain Jones to his house; the acquaintance went no further than the bench in St. James's Park; and when, as soon fell out, the Captain's difficulties forced him to the greater privacy of a little cabin at Mortlake, he forgot entirely the military gentlemen who, presumably, still sought an appetite for dinner or some alleviation of his own sour mood in loitering and gossiping with the park-saunterers of St. James's.

But among the amiable characteristics of Captain Jones was a love of wife and child, scarcely to be wondered at, indeed, considering his wife's lively and entertaining disposition and the extraordinary promise of that little girl who was later to become the wife of Lord Cornwallis. At whatever risk to himself, Captain Jones would steal back to revisit his wife and to hear his little girl recite the part of Juliet which, under his teaching, she had perfectly by heart. On one such secret journey he was hurrying to get within the royal sanctuary of St. James's when a voice called on him to stop. His fears obsessing him, he hurried the faster, his pursuer close at his heels. Realizing that escape was impossible, Jones wheeled about and facing his pursuer, whom he recognized as the Attorney Brown, demanded what his enemy wanted of him. Far from being

his enemy, said Brown, he was the best friend he had ever had, which he would prove if Jones would accompany him to the first tavern that came to hand. There, in a private room over a fire, Mr. Brown disclosed the following astonishing story. An unknown friend, he said, who had scrutinized Jones's conduct carefully and concluded that his deserts outweighed his misdemeanours, was prepared to settle all his debts and indeed to put him beyond the reach of such tormentors in future. At these words a load was lifted from Jones's heart, and he cried out 'Good God! Who can this paragon of friendship be?' It was none other, said Brown, than General Skelton. General Skelton, the man whom he had only met to chat with on a bench in St. James's Park? Jones asked in wonderment, Yes it was the General, Brown assured him. Then let him hasten to throw himself in gratitude at his benefactor's knee! Not so fast, Brown replied; General Skelton will never speak to you again. General Skelton died last night.

The extent of Captain Jones's good fortune was indeed magnificent. The General had left Captain Jones sole heir to all his possessions on no other condition than that he should assume the name of Skelton instead of Jones. Hastening through streets no longer dreadful, since every debt of honour could now be paid, Captain Jones brought his wife the astonishing news of their good fortune, and they promptly set out to view that part which lay nearest to hand—the General's great house in Henrietta Street. Gazing about her, half in dream, half in earnest, Mrs. Jones was so overcome with the tumult of her emotions that she could not stay to gather in the extent of her possessions, but ran to Little Bedford Street, where Mrs. Wilkinson was then living, to impart her joy. Meanwhile, the news that General Skelton lay dead in Henrietta Street without a son to succeed him spread abroad, and those who thought themselves his heirs arrived in the house of death to take stock of their inheritance, among them one great and beautiful lady whose avarice was her undoing, whose misfortunes were equal to her sins, Kitty Chudleigh, Countess of Bristol, Duchess of Kingston. Miss Chudleigh, as she then called herself, believed, and who can doubt that with her passionate nature, her lust for wealth and property, her pistols, and her parsimony, she believed with vehemence and asserted her belief with arrogance, that all General Skelton's property had legally descended to her. Later, when the

will was read and the truth made public that not only the house in Henrietta Street, but Pap Castle in Cumberland and the lands and lead-mines pertaining to it, were left without exception to an unknown Captain Jones, she burst out in 'terms exceeding all bounds of delicacy'. She cried that her relative the General was an old fool in his dotage, that Jones and his wife were impudent low upstarts beneath her notice, and so flounced into her coach 'with a scornful quality toss' to carry on that life of deceit and intrigue and ambition which drove her later to wander in ignominy, an outcast from her country.

What remains to be told of the fortunes of Captain Jones can be briefly despatched. Having now furnished the house in Henrietta Street, the Jones family set out when summer came to visit their estates in Cumberland. The country was so fair, the Castle so stately, the thought that now all belonged to them so gratifying that their progress for three weeks was one of unmixed pleasure and the spot where they were now to live seemed a paradise. But there was an eagerness, an impetuosity about James Jones which made him impatient to suffer even the smiles of fortune passively. He must be active—he must be up and doing. He must be 'let down', for all his friends could do to dissuade him, to view a lead-mine. The consequences as they foretold were disastrous. He was drawn up, indeed, but already infected with a deadly sickness of which in a few days he died, in the arms of his wife, in the midst of that paradise which he had toiled so long to reach and now was to die without enjoying.

Meanwhile the Wilkinsons—but that name, alas, was no longer applicable to them, nor did the Doctor and his wife any more inhabit the house in the Savoy—the Wilkinsons had suffered more extremities at the hands of Fate than the Joneses themselves. Dr. Wilkinson, it has been said, resembled his friend Jones in the conviviality of his habits and his inability to keep within the limits of his income. Indeed, his wife's dowry of two thousand pounds had gone to pay off the debts of his youth. But by what means could he pay off the debts of his middle age? He was now past fifty, and what with good company and good living, was seldom free from duns, and always pressed for money. Suddenly, from an unexpected quarter, help appeared. This was none other than the 'Marriage Act, passed in 1755, which laid it down that if any person solemnized

a marriage without publishing the banns, unless a marriage licence had already been obtained, he should be subject to transportation for fourteen years. Dr. Wilkinson, looking at the matter, it is to be feared, from his own angle, and with a view to his own necessities, argued that as Chaplain of the Savoy, which was extra-Parochial and Royal-exempt, he could grant licences as usual—a privilege which at once brought him such a glut of business, such a crowd of couples wishing to be married in a hurry, that the rat-tat-tat never ceased on his street door, and cash flooded the family exchequer so that even his little boy's pockets were lined with gold. The duns were paid; the table sumptuously spread. But Dr. Wilkinson shared another failing of his friend Jones; he would not take advice. His friends warned him; the Government plainly hinted that if he persisted they would be forced to act. Secure in what he imagined to be his right, enjoying the prosperity it brought him to the full, the Doctor paid no heed. On Easter Day he was engaged in marrying from eight in the morning till twelve at night. At last, one Sunday, the King's Messengers appeared. The Doctor escaped by a secret walk over the leads of the Savoy, made his way to the river bank, where he slipped upon some logs and fell, heavy and elderly as he was, in the mud; but nevertheless got to Somerset stairs, took a boat, and reached the Kentish shore in safety. Even now he brazened it out that the law was on his side, and came back four weeks later prepared to stand his trial. Once more, for the last time, company overflowed the house in the Savoy; lawyers abounded, and, as they ate and drank, assured Dr. Wilkinson that his case was already won. In July, 1756, the trial began. But what conclusion could there be? The crime had been committed and persisted in openly in spite of warning. The Doctor was found guilty and sentenced to fourteen years' transportation.

It remained for his friends to fit him out, like the gentleman he was, for his voyage to America. There, they argued, his gifts of speech and person would make him welcome, and later his wife and son could join him. To them he bade farewell in the dismal precincts of Newgate in March, 1757. But contrary winds beat the ship back to shore; the gout seized on a body enfeebled by pleasure and adversity; at Plymouth Dr. Wilkinson was transported finally and for ever. The lead-mine undid Jones; the Marriage Act was the downfall of Wilkinson. Both now sleep in peace, Jones in Cumber-

land, Wilkinson, far from his friend (and if their failings were great, great too were their gifts and graces) on the shores of the melancholy Atlantic.

## Selina Trimmer<sup>1</sup>

THE gardens at Chatsworth which contained so many strange exotic plants brought by the great gardener Paxton from foreign lands, could boast, too, of one modest daisy whose surname was Trimmer and whose Christian name was Selina. She was a governess of course, and when we think what it meant to Charlotte Brontë and to Miss Weeton to be a governess in a middle-class family, the life of Selina Trimmer redounds more to the credit of the Cavendishes than all the splendours of Chatsworth, Devonshire House and Hardwick Hall. She was a governess; yet her pupil Lady Harriet wrote to her when she became engaged, 'I send you the enclosed bracelet. . . . I often think of all your past conduct to me with affection and gratitude not to be expressed. God bless you, my dearest friend.'

Selina sheds light upon the Cavendishes, but outside that radiance little is known of her. Her life must begin with a negative—she was not her sister-in-law, the famous Mrs. Trimmer of the *Tales*. She had a brother who lived at Brentford. From Brentford then, about 1790, came Selina, up the great marble stairs, following a footman, to be governess to the little Cavendishes in the nursery at Devonshire House. But were they all Cavendishes—the six romping, high-spirited children she found there? Three it appeared had no right to any surname at all. And who was the Lady Elizabeth Foster who lived on such intimate terms with the disagreeable Duke, and on such friendly terms with the lovely Duchess? Soon it must have dawned upon Trimmer as she sat over her Quaker discourse when her pupils were in bed that she had taken up her lodging in the abode of vice. Downstairs there was drinking and gambling; upstairs there were bastards and mistresses. According to Brentford standards she should have drawn her skirts about her and flounced out of the polluted place at once. Yet she stayed on. Far from being vicious, the Devonshire House family was healthy and in its own way virtuous. No more devoted family existed. The children adored their mother. They were on the best of terms with one another. If the Duke was an indifferent father, his daughters

<sup>1</sup> Written in June, 1940

were as dutiful as the daughters of any country parson. One person, it is true, all the children hated, and that was Lady Liz. But they hated her not because she was their father's mistress, but because she was corrupt; whining and cooing, false and spiteful. Could it be possible, then, that an absence of conventional morality brings into being a real morality? Were not the little girls, Georgiana and Hary-o,<sup>1</sup> who knew from childhood all the facts that are concealed from female Trimmers till they were married women, far less sentimental, less prudish and silly, infinitely more honest, sensible and downright than the middle-class girls whose virtue was so carefully shielded at Brentford?

These were questions that Trimmer must have pondered as she walked with her dubious brood in Hyde Park or escorted them to parties. They were asked everywhere. The courtyard at Devonshire House was full of coaches by day and by night. Nobody looked askance at them. So, while she taught the little Cavendishes their sums and their pot-hooks, they taught her; they enlarged her mind. They laughed at her and teased her and vowed that she was carrying on a love affair with Bob Adair. But for all that they treated her as if she were a woman of flesh and blood. There was only one class for the Cavendish children, and that was their own. Whatever their faults, and Hary-o always overslept, and could never read only one book at a time, the Cavendishes were the least snobbish of people. They treated her as an equal; they accepted her as part of their pagan and classless society. When the girls began to go out into the world they wrote as frankly and freely to their 'dearest Selina' about their parties and their partners as they wrote to each other.

By the time they were going out into the great world, Trimmer was well aware of its dangers. She could take comfort in the fact that Georgiana and Hary-o were spared at least one temptation—they had not their mother's beauty. 'I am delighted to be reckoned like mama', Hary-o wrote. "'A very bad edition though," as an honest man said of me at Mrs. Somebody's party.' They were short, fat, and rather heavy-featured. But by way of compensation they had excellent brains. Their little eyes were extremely shrewd; in mind they were precocious and caustic. Hary-o could dash off a description of her fox-hunting cousin Althorp with a vivacity that

<sup>1</sup> *Hary-o*. The Letters of Lady Harriet Cavendish, 1796-1809. Edited by her grandson, Sir George Leveson-Gower, K.B.E., and his daughter, Iris Palmer.



any novelist might have envied, and with a worldly wisdom that would have done credit to a dowager.

Althorp as he might have been, no reasonable woman could refuse or help loving and respecting. Althorp as he is, no reasonable woman can for a moment think of but as an eager huntsman. He has no more importance in society *now* (as he is, remember) than the chairs and tables. . . . Evenings and Sundays are to him a visible penance. . . . But when he appears at breakfast in his red jacket and jockey cap, it is a sort of intoxicating delight that must be seen to seem credible, and one feels the same sort of good-natured pleasure as at seeing a Newfoundland dog splash into the water, a goldfinch out of his cage, or a mouse run out of his trap. This is the man that I cannot wish to marry. . . .

Shocked, puzzled yet charmed, Selina stayed on. But she preserved her own standards. In that intimate society where every lord and lady had a nickname, Trimmer had hers. She was called *Raison Sévère*, *Triste Raison*, *Vent de Bise*. Lady Bessborough lamented ' . . . rigidly right, she forgets that one may do right without making oneself disagreeable to everyone around'. And Bess, Lady Elizabeth Foster, shivered in her presence. 'Bess . . . says she always affects her like a North-East wind.' Trimmer was no sycophant. By degrees she assumed the part that is so often played by the humble retainer; from governess she became confidante. In that wild whirling life of incessant love-making and intrigue she represented reason, morality—something that Hary-o as she grew up missed in her mother and needed. Mama, she owned to her sister when Duncannon pestered her, was 'not prudent'; mama did not mind putting her daughter into a 'most awkward situation'. But Selina, on the other hand, 'gave me a most furious lecture that my coquetry was dreadful, and that, without caring for my cousin, I had made him fall in love with me'. It was 'merely to enjoy the triumph of supplanting Lady E.', Trimmer said. Lady Harriet was angry at Trimmer's plain speaking, but she respected her for it nevertheless.

More and more, as Hary-o grew older, the extraordinary complications of Devonshire House morality involved her in tortures of doubt—what was her duty to her father, what, after her mother's death, to his mistress, and what did she owe to society? Ought she to

allow Lady Liz to drag her into the company of the abandoned Mrs. Fitzherbert? 'And yet I have no right to be nice about the company I go into; or rather no power, for I think no blame can be attached to me for that I so reluctantly live in.' Strangely, it was not to the Bessboroughs or to the Melbournes that Hary-o turned in her dilemma; it was to Trimmer. Though companion now to old Lady Spencer, Trimmer came back to bear Harriet company at Devonshire House when Lady Liz was queening it there, saying 'we' and 'us' all the time, and fondling the Duke's spotted and speckled puppies in her shawl. Trimmer alone had the courage to show that the dogs bored her. Trimmer compelled the Duke and George Lamb to talk about 'the Quaker persuasion and Mr. Boreham's scruples about giving the oath'. In those tortured days Trimmer, 'arch advocate of reason', was the greatest blessing to her distracted pupil. And it was finally to Trimmer that Harriet turned when the crucial question of her life had to be decided. Was she to marry her aunt's lover, Lord Granville? He had two children by Lady Bessborough. They had always been in league against her. She had hated him; yet there had come over her the spell of his wonderful almond-shaped eyes, and it would mean escape—from Lady Liz, from the ignominies and insults that her father's mistress put upon her. What was she to do? What she did was to marry Granville—'Adored Granville, who would make a barren desert smile.' And it proved, on the face of it, an ideal union. Lord Granville became a model of the domestic virtues. Harriet developed into the most respectable of Victorian matrons, wearing a large black bonnet, setting up old orange women with baskets of trifles, illuminating book-markers with texts, and attending church assiduously. She survived till 1862. But did Trimmer suffer a Victorian change? Or did Trimmer remain immutably herself? There was something hardy and perennial about Trimmer. One can imagine her grown very old and very gaunt, dwindling out her declining years in discreet obscurity. But what tales she could have told had she liked—about the lovely Duchess and the foolish Caro Ponsonby, and the Melbournes and the Bessboroughs—all vanished, all changed. The only relic of that wild world that remained was the bracelet on her wrist. It recalled much that had better be forgotten, and yet, as Trimmer looked at it, how happy she had been in Devonshire House with Hary-o, her dearest friend.

## The Man at the Gate<sup>1</sup>

THE man was Coleridge as De Quincey saw him, standing in a gateway. For it is vain to put the single word Coleridge at the head of a page—Coleridge the innumerable, the mutable, the atmospheric; Coleridge who is part of Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley; of his age and of our own; Coleridge whose written words fill hundreds of pages and overflow innumerable margins; whose spoken words still reverberate, so that as we enter his radius he seems not a man, but a swarm, a cloud, a buzz of words, darting this way and that, clustering, quivering, and hanging suspended. So little of this can be caught in any reader's net that it is well before we become dazed in the labyrinth of what we call Coleridge to have a clear picture before us—the picture of a man standing at a gate:

... his person was broad and full, and tended even to corpulence, his complexion was fair . . . his eyes were large and soft in their expression and it was from the peculiar appearance of haze or dreaminess which mixed with their light, that I recognized my object.

That was in 1807. Coleridge was already incapable of movement. The Kendal black drop had robbed him of his will 'You bid me rouse myself—go, bid a man paralytic in both arms rub them briskly together.' The arms already hung flabby at his side; he was powerless to raise them. But the disease which paralysed his will left his mind unfettered. In proportion as he became incapable of action, he became capable of feeling. As he stood at the gate his vast expanse of being was a passive target for innumerable arrows, all of them sharp, many of them poisoned. To confess, to analyse, to describe was the only alleviation of his appalling torture—the prisoner's only means of escape.

Thus there shapes itself in the volumes of Coleridge's letters an immense mass of quivering matter, as if the swarm had attached itself to a bough and hung there pendent. Sentences roll like drops down a pane, drop collecting drop, but when they reach the bottom, the pane is smeared. A great novelist, Dickens for preference,

<sup>1</sup>Written in September, 1940

could have formed out of this swarm and diffusion a prodigious, an immortal character. Dickens, could he have been induced to listen, would have noted—perhaps this:

Deeply wounded by very disrespectful words used concerning me, and which struggling as I have been thro' life, and still maintaining a character and holding connexions no way unworthy of my Family . . .

Or again:

The worst part of the charges were that I had been imprudent enough and in the second place gross and indelicate enough to send out a gentleman's servant in his own house to a public house for a bottle of brandy . . .

Or again:

What Joy would it not be to you or to me, Miss Betham! to meet a Milton in a future state . . .

And again, on accepting a loan:

I can barely collect myself sufficiently to convey to you—first, that I receive this proof of your filial kindness with feelings not unworthy of the same . . . but that, whenever (if ever) my circumstances shall improve, you must permit me to remind you that what was, and *forever* under *all* conditions of fortune will be, *felt* as a *gift*, has become a Loan—and lastly, that you must let me have you as a frequent friend on whose visits I may rely as often as convenience will permit you . . .

The very voice (drastically cut short) of Micawber himself!

But there is a difference. For this Micawber knows that he is Micawber. He holds a looking-glass in his hand. He is a man of exaggerated self-consciousness, endowed with an astonishing power of self-analysis. Dickens would need to be doubled with Henry James, to be trebled with Proust, in order to convey the complexity and the conflict of a Pecksniff who despises his own hypocrisy, of a Micawber who is humiliated by his own humiliation. He is so made that he can hear the crepitation of a leaf, and yet remains obtuse to the claims of wife and child. An unopened letter brings great drops of sweat to his forehead; yet to lift a pen and answer it is beyond his power. The Dickens Coleridge and the

Henry James Coleridge perpetually tear him asunder. The one sends out surreptitiously to Mr. Dunn the chemist for another bottle of opium; and the other analyses the motives that have led to this hypocrisy into an infinity of fine shreds.

Thus often in reading the 'gallop scrawl of the letters from Highgate in 1820 we seem to be reading notes for a late work by Henry James. He is the forerunner of all who have tried to reveal the intricacies, to take the faintest creases of the human soul. The great sentences pocketed with parentheses, expanded with dash after dash, break their walls under the strain of including and qualifying and suggesting all that Coleridge feels, fears, and glimpses. Often he is prolix to the verge of incoherence, and his meaning dwindles and fades to a wisp on the mind's horizon. Yet in our tongue-tied age there is a joy in this reckless abandonment to the glory of words. Cajoled, caressed, tossed up in handfuls, words yield those flashing phrases that hang like ripe fruit in the many-leaved tree of his immense volubility. 'Brow-hanging, shoe-contemplative, *strange*'; there is Hazlitt. Of Dr. Darwin: 'He was like a pigeon picking up peas, and afterwards voiding them with excremental additions.' Anything may tumble out of that great maw; the subtlest criticism, the wildest jest, the exact condition of his intestines. But he uses words most often to express the crepitations of his apprehensive susceptibility. They serve as a smoke-screen between him and the menace of the real world. The word screen trembles and shivers. What enemy is approaching? Nothing visible to the naked eye. And yet how he trembles and quivers! Hartley, 'poor Hartley . . . in shrinking from the momentary pain of telling the plain truth, a truth not discreditable to him or to me, has several times inflicted an agitating pain and confusion'—by what breach of morality or dereliction of duty?—'by bringing up Mr. Bourton unexpectedly on Sundays with the intention of dining here.' Is that all? Ah, but a diseased body feels the stab of anguish if only a corn is trod upon. Anguish shoots through every fibre of his being. Has he not himself often shrunk from the momentary pain of telling the plain truth? Why has he no home to offer his son, no table to which Hartley could bring his friends uninvited? Why does he live a stranger in the house of friends, and be (at present) unable to discharge his share of the housekeeping expenses? The old train of bitter thoughts is set in motion once more. He is one hum and vibra-

tion of painful emotion. And then, giving it all the slip, he takes refuge in thought and provides Hartley with 'in short, the sum of all my reading and reflections on the vast Wheel of the Mythology of the earliest and purest Heathenism'. Hartley must feed upon that and take a snack of cold meat and pickles at some inn.

Letter-writing was in its way a substitute for opium. In his letters he could persuade others to believe what he did not altogether believe himself—that he had actually written the folios, the quartos, the octavos that he had planned. Letters also relieved him of those perpetually pullulating ideas which, like Surinam toads, as he said, were always giving birth to little toads that 'grow quickly and draw off attention from the mother toad'. In letters thoughts need not be brought to a conclusion. Somebody was always interrupting, and then he could throw down his pen and indulge in what was, after all, better than writing—the 'insemination' of ideas without the intermediary of any gross impediment by word of mouth into the receptive, the acquiescent, the entirely passive ear, say, of Mr. Green who arrived punctually at three. Later, if it were Thursday, in came politicians, economists, musicians, business-men, fine ladies, children—it mattered not who they were so long as he could talk and they would listen.

Two pious American editors have collected the comments of this various company,<sup>1</sup> and they are, of course, various. Yet it is the only way of getting at the truth—to have it broken into many splinters by many mirrors and so select. The truth about Coleridge the talker seems to have been that he rapt some listeners to the seventh heaven; bored others to extinction; and made one foolish girl giggle irrepressibly. In the same way his eyes were brown to some, grey to others, and again a very bright blue. But there is one point upon which all who listened are agreed; not one of them could remember a single word he said. All, however, with astonishing unanimity are agreed that it was 'like'—the waves of the ocean, the flowing of a mighty river, the splendour of the Aurora Borealis, the radiance of the Milky Way. Almost all are equally agreed that waves, river, Borealis, and Milky Way lacked, as Lady Jerningham tersely put it, 'behind'. From their accounts it is clear that he avoided contradiction; detested personality; cared nothing who you were; only needed some sound of breathing or rustle of skirts to

<sup>1</sup> *Coleridge the Talker* Edited by Richard W. Armour and Raymond F. Howes

stir his flocks of dreaming thoughts into motion and light the glitter and magic that lay sunk in the torpid flesh. Was it the mixture of body and mind in his talk that gave off some hypnotic fume that lulled the audience into drowsiness? He acted as he talked; now, if he felt the interest flag, pointing to a picture, or caressing a child, and then, as the time to make an exit approached, majestically possessed himself of a bedroom candlestick and, still discoursing, disappeared. Thus played upon by gesture and voice, brow and glittering eye, no one, as Crabb Robinson remarks, could take a note. It is then in his letters, where the body of the actor was suppressed, that we have the best record of the siren's song. There we hear the voice that began talking at the age of two—'Nasty Doctor Young' are his first recorded words; and went on in barracks, on board ship, in pulpits, in stage-coaches—it mattered not where he found himself or with whom, Keats it might be or the baker's boy—on he went, on and on, talking about nightingales, dreams, the will, the volition, the reason, the understanding, monsters, and mermaids, until a little girl, overcome by the magic of the incantation, burst into tears when the voice ceased and left her alone in a silent world.

We too, when the voice stops only half an hour before he passed that July day in 1834 into silence, feel bereft. Is it for hours or for years that this heavily built man standing in a gate has been pouring forth this passionate soliloquy, while his 'large soft eyes with a peculiar expression of haze or dreaminess mixed in their light' have been fixed upon a far-away vision that filled a very few pages with poems in which every word is exact and every image as clear as crystal?

## Sara Coleridge<sup>1</sup>

COLERIDGE also left children of his body. One, his daughter, Sara, was a continuation of him, not of his flesh indeed, for she was minute, aetherial, but of his mind, his temperament. The whole of her forty-eight years were lived in the light of his sunset, so that, like other children of great men, she is a chequered dappled figure flitting between a vanished radiance and the light of every day. And, like so many of her father's works, Sara Coleridge remains unfinished. Mr. Griggs<sup>2</sup> has written her life, exhaustively, sympathetically; but still . . . dots intervene. That extremely interesting fragment, her autobiography, ends with three rows of dots after twenty-six pages. She intended, she says, to end every section with a moral, or a reflection. And then 'on reviewing my earlier childhood I found the predominant reflection. . . .' There she stops. But she said many things in those twenty-six pages, and Mr. Griggs has added others that tempt us to fill in the dots, though not with the facts that she might have given us.

'Send me the very feel of her sweet Flesh, the very look and motion of that mouth—O, I could drive myself mad about her', Coleridge wrote when she was a baby. She was a lovely child, delicate, large-eyed, musing but active, very still but always in motion, like one of her father's poems. She remembered how he took her as a child to stay with the Wordsworths at Allan Bank. The rough farmhouse life was distasteful to her, and to her shame they bathed her in a room where men came in and out. Delicately dressed in lace and muslin for her father liked white for girls, she was a contrast to Dora, with her wild eyes and floating yellow hair and frock of deep Prussian blue or purple—for Wordsworth liked clothes to be coloured. The visit was full of such contrasts and conflicts. Her father cherished her and petted her. 'I slept with him and he would tell me fairy stories when he came to bed at twelve or one o'clock. . . .' Then her mother, Mrs. Coleridge, arrived, and Sara flew to that honest, homely, motherly woman and 'wished never to be separated from her'. At that—the memory was still bitter—'my

<sup>1</sup> Written in September, 1940

<sup>2</sup> *Coleridge Fille: A Biography of Sara Coleridge*, by Earl Leslie Griggs



father showed displeasure and accused me of want of affection. I could not understand why. . . . I think my father's motive', she reflected later, 'must have been a wish to fasten my affections on him. . . . I slunk away and hid myself in the wood behind the house.'

But it was her father who, when she lay awake terrified by a horse with eyes of flame, gave her a candle. He, too, had been afraid of the dark. With his candle beside her, she lost her fear, and lay awake, listening to the sound of the river, to the thud of the forge hammer, and to the cries of stray animals in the fields. The sounds haunted her all her life. No country, no garden, no house ever compared with the Fells and the horseshoe lawn and the room with three windows looking over the lake to the mountains. She sat there while her father, Wordsworth and De Quincey paced up and down talking. What they said she could not understand, but she 'used to note the handkerchief hanging out of the pocket and long to clutch it'. When she was a child the handkerchief vanished and her father with it. After that, 'I never lived with him for more than a few weeks at a time', she wrote. A room at Greta Hall was always kept ready for him but he never came. Then the brothers, Hartley and Derwent, vanished, too; and Mrs. Coleridge and Sara stayed on with Uncle Southey, feeling their dependence and resenting it. 'A house of bondage Greta Hall was to her', Hartley wrote. Yet there was Uncle Southey's library; and thanks to that admirable, erudite, and indefatigable man, Sara became mistress of six languages, translated Dobritzshoffer from the Latin, to help pay for Hartley's education, and qualified herself, should the worst come, to earn her living. 'Should it be necessary', Wordsworth wrote, 'she will be well fitted to become a governess in a nobleman's or gentleman's family. . . . She is remarkably clever.'

But it was her beauty that took her father by surprise when at last at the age of twenty she visited him at Highgate. She was learned he knew, and he was proud of it; but he was unprepared, Mr. Griggs says, 'for the dazzling vision of loveliness which stepped across the threshold one cold December day'. People rose in a public hall when she came in. 'I have seen Miss Coleridge', Lamb wrote, 'and I wish I had just such a—daughter.' Did Coleridge wish to keep such a daughter? Was a father's jealousy roused in that will-less man of inordinate susceptibility when Sara met her cousin Henry up at Highgate and almost instantly, but secretly,

gave him her coral necklace in exchange for a ring with his hair? What right had a father who could not offer his daughter even a room to be told of the engagement or to object to it? He could only quiver with innumerable conflicting sensations at the thought that his nephew, whose book on the West Indies had impressed him unfavourably, was taking from him the daughter who, like Christabel, was his masterpiece, but, like Christabel, was unfinished. All he could do was to cast his magic spell. He talked. For the first time since she was a woman, Sara heard him talk. She could not remember a word of it afterwards. And she was penitent. It was partly that

my father generally discoursed on such a very extensive scale. . . . Henry could sometimes bring him down to narrower topics. . . but when alone with me he was almost always on the star-paved road, taking in the whole heavens in his circuit.

She was a heaven-haunter, too; but at the moment 'I was anxious about my brothers and their prospects—about Henry's health, and upon the subject of my engagement generally'. Her father ignored such things. Sara's mind wandered.

The young couple, however, made ample amends for that momentary inattention. They listened to his voice for the rest of their lives. At the christening of their first child, Coleridge talked for six hours without stopping. Hard-worked as Henry was, and delicate, sociable, and pleasure-loving, the spell of Uncle Sam was on him, and so long as he lived he helped his wife. He annotated, he edited, he set down what he could remember of the wonderful voice. But the main labour fell on Sara. She made herself, she said, the housekeeper in that littered palace. She followed his reading; verified his quotations; defended his character; traced notes on innumerable margins; ransacked bundles; pieced beginnings together and supplied them not with ends but with continuations. A whole day's work would result in one erasure. Cab fares to newspaper offices mounted; eyes, for she could not afford a secretary, felt the strain; but so long as a page remained obscure, a date doubtful, a reference unverified, an aspersion not disproved, 'poor, dear, indefatigable Sara', as Mrs. Wordsworth called her, worked on. And much of her work was done lastingly; editors still stand on the foundations she truly laid.

Much of it was not self-sacrifice, but self-realization. She found her father, in those blurred pages, as she had not found him in the flesh; and she found that he was herself. She did not copy him, she insisted; she was him. Often she continued his thoughts as if they had been her own. Did she not even shuffle a little in her walk, as he did, from side to side? Yet though she spent half her time in reflecting that vanished radiance, the other half was spent in the light of common day—at Chester Place, Regents Park. Children were born and children died. Her health broke down; she had her father's legacy of harassed nerves; and, like her father, had need of opium. Pathetically she wished that she could be given 'three years' respite from child bearing'. But she wished in vain. Then Henry, whose gaiety had so often dragged her from the dark abyss, died young; leaving his notes unfinished, and two children also, and very little money, and many apartments in Uncle Sam's great house still unswept.

She worked on. In her desolation it was her solace, her opium perhaps. 'Things of the mind and intellect give me intense pleasure; they delight and amuse me as they are in themselves . . . and sometimes I think, the result has been too large, the harvest too abundant, in inward satisfaction. This is dangerous. . . .' Thought proliferated. Like her father she had a Surinam toad in her head, breeding other toads. But his were jewelled; hers were plain. She was diffuse, unable to conclude, and without the magic that does instead of a conclusion. She would have liked, had she been able to make an end, to have written—on metaphysics, on theology, some book of criticism. Or again, politics interested her intensely, and Turner's pictures. But 'whatever subject I commence, I feel discomfort unless I could pursue it in every direction to the farthest bounds of thought. . . . This was the reason why my father wrote by snatches. He could not bear to complete incompletely.' So, book in hand, pen suspended, large eyes filled with a dreamy haze, she mused—'picking flowers, and finding nests, and exploring some particular nook, as I used to be when a child walking with my Uncle Southey. . . .'

Then her children interrupted. With her son, the brilliant Herbert, she read straight through the classics. Were there not, Mr. Justice Coleridge objected, passages in Aristophanes that they had better skip? Perhaps. . . . Still, Herbert took all the prizes, won

all the scholarships, almost drove her to distraction with his horn-playing and, like his father, loved parties. Sara went to balls, and watched him dance waltz after waltz. She had the old lovely clothes that Henry had given her altered for her daughter, Edith. She found herself eating supper twice, she was so bored. She preferred dinner parties where she held her own with Macaulay, who was so like her father in the face, and with Carlyle—'A precious Arch-charlatan,' she called him. The young poets, like Aubrey de Vere, sought her out. She was one of those, he said, 'whose thoughts are growing while they speak'. After he had gone, her thoughts followed him, in long, long letters, rambling over baptism, regenerations, metaphysics, theology, and poetry, past, present, and to come. As a critic she never, like her father, grazed paths of light; she was a fertilizer, not a creator, a burrowing, tunnelling reader, throwing up molehills as she read her way through Dante, Virgil, Aristophanes, Crawshaw, Jane Austen, Crabbe, to emerge suddenly, unafraid, in the very face of Keats and Shelley. 'Fain would mine eyes', she wrote, 'discern the Future in the past.'

Past, present, future dappled her with a strange light. She was mixed in herself, still divided, as in the wood behind the house, between two loyalties, to the father who told her fairy stories in bed; and to the mother—Frettikins she called her—to whom she clung in the flesh. 'Dear mother', she exclaimed, 'what an honest, simple, lively minded affectionate woman she was, how free from disguise or artifice. . . .' Why, even her wig—she had cut her hair off as a girl—'was as dry and rough and dull as a piece of stubble, and as short and stumpy.' The wig and the brow—she understood them both. Could she have skipped the moral she could have told us much about that strange marriage. She meant to write her life. But she was interrupted. There was a lump on her breast. Mr. Gilman, consulted, detected cancer. She did not want to die. She had not finished editing her father's works, she had not written her own, for she did not like to complete incompletely. But she died at forty-eight, leaving, like her father, a blank page covered with dots, and two lines.

Father, no amaranths e'er shall wreath my brow—  
Enough that round thy grave they flourish now.

## Harriette Wilson<sup>1</sup>

**A**CROSS the broad continent of a woman's life falls the shadow of a sword. On one side all is correct, definite, orderly; the paths are strait, the trees regular, the sun shaded; escorted by gentlemen, protected by policemen, wedded and buried by clergymen, she has only to walk demurely from cradle to grave and no one will touch a hair of her head. But on the other side all is confusion. Nothing follows a regular course. The paths wind between bogs and precipices. The trees roar and rock and fall in ruin. There, too, what strange company is to be met—in what bewildering variety! Stonemasons hobnob with Dukes of the blood royal—Mr. Blore treads on the heels of His Grace the Duke of Argyll. Byron rambles through, the Duke of Wellington marches in with all his orders on him. For in that strange land gentlemen are immune; any being of the male sex can cross from sun to shade with perfect safety. In that strange land money is poured out lavishly; bank-notes drop on to breakfast plates; pearl rings are found beneath pillows; champagne flows in fountains; but over it all broods the fever of a nightmare and the transiency of a dream. The brilliant fade; the great mysteriously disappear; the diamonds turn to cinders, and the Queens are left sitting on three-legged stools shivering in the cold. That great Princess, Harriette Wilson, with her box at the Opera and the Peerage at her feet, found herself before she was fifty reduced to solitude, to poverty, to life in foreign parts, to marriage with a Colonel, to scribbling for cash whatever she could remember or invent of her past.

Nevertheless it would be a grave mistake to think that Harriette repented her ways or would have chosen another career had she had the chance. She was a girl of fifteen when she stepped across the sword and became, for reasons which she will not specify, the mistress of the Earl of Craven. A few facts leak out later. She was educated at a convent and shocked the nuns. Her parents had fifteen children; their home was 'truly uncomfortable'; her father was a Swiss with a passion for mathematics, always on the point of solving a problem, and furious if interrupted; while the unhappi-

Written in 1925

ness of her parents' married life had decided Harriette before she was ten 'to live free as air from any restraint but that of my own conscience'. So she stepped across. And at once, the instant her foot touched those shifting sands, everything wobbled; her character, her principles, the world itself—all suffered a sea change. For ever after (it is one of the curiosities of her memoirs—one of the obstacles to any certain knowledge of her character) she is outside the pale of ordinary values and must protest till she is black in the face, and run up a whole fabric of lies into the bargain, before she can make good her claim to a share in the emotions of human kind. Could a mere prostitute grieve genuinely for a mother's death? Mr. Thomas Seccombe, in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, had his doubts. Harriette Wilson, he said, described her sister's death 'with an appearance of feeling', whereas to Mr. Seccombe Lord Hertford's kindness in soothing the same creature's last hours was indisputably genuine.

Outcast as she was, her position had another and an incongruous result. She was impelled, though nothing was further from her liking than serious thought, to speculate a little curiously about the law of the society, to consult, with odd results, the verdict of 'my own conscience'. For example, the marriage law—was that as impeccably moral as people made out? 'I cannot for the life of me divest myself of the idea that if all were alike honourable and true, as I wish to be, it would be unnecessary to bind men and women together by law, since two persons who may have chosen each other from affection, possessing heart and honour, could not part, and where there is neither the one nor the other, even marriage does not bind. My idea may be wicked or erroneous', she adds hastily, for what could be more absurd than that Harriette Wilson should set herself up as a judge of morality—Harry, as the gentlemen called her, whose only rule of conduct was 'One wants a little variety in life', who left one man because he bored her, and another because he drew pictures of cocoa-trees on vellum paper, and seduced poor young Lord Worcester, and went off to Melton Mowbray with Mr. Meyler, and, in short, was the mistress of any man who had money and rank and a person that took her fancy? No, Harriette was not moral, nor refined, nor, it appears, very beautiful, but merely a bustling bouncing vivacious creature with good eyes and dark hair and 'the manners of a wild schoolboy', said Sir Walter

Scott, who had dined in her presence. But it cannot be doubted—otherwise her triumph is inexplicable—that gifts she had, gifts of dash and go and enthusiasm, which still stir among the dead leaves of her memoirs and impart even to their rambling verbosity and archness and vulgarity some thrill of that old impetuosity, some flash of those fine dark eyes, some fling of those wild schoolboy manners which, when furbished up in plumes and red plush and diamonds, held our ancestors enthralled.

She was, of course, always falling in love. She saw a stranger riding with a Newfoundland dog in Knightsbridge and lost her heart to his 'pale expressive beauty' at once. She venerated his door-knocker even, and when Lord Ponsonby—for Lord Ponsonby it was—deserted her, she flung herself sobbing on a doorstep in Half Moon Street and was carried, raving and almost dying, back to bed. Large and voluptuous herself, she loved for the most part little men with small hands and feet, and, like Mr. Meyler, skins of remarkable transparency, 'churchyard skins', foreboding perhaps an early death; 'yet it would be hard to die, in the bloom of youth and beauty, beloved by everybody, and with thirty thousand a year'. She loved, too, the Apollo Belvedere, and sat entranced at the Louvre, exclaiming in ecstasy at the 'quivering lips—the throat!', till it seemed as if she must share the fate of another lady who sat by the Apollo, 'whom she could not warm, till she went raving mad, and in that state died'. But it is not her loves that distinguish her; her passions tend to become perfunctory; her young men with fine skins and large fortunes innumerable; her rhapsodies and recriminations monotonous. It is when off duty, released from the necessity of painting the usual picture in the usual way, that she becomes capable of drawing one of those pictures which only seem to await some final stroke to become a page in *Vanity Fair* or a sketch by Hogarth. All the materials of comedy seem heaped in disorder before us as she, the most notorious woman in London, retires to Charmouth to await the return of her lover, Lord Worcester, from the Spanish wars, trots to church on the arm of the curate's aged father, or peeps from her window at the rustic beauties of Lyme Regis tripping down to the sixpenny Assembly Rooms with 'turbans or artificial flowers twined around their wigs' to dance at five in the evening on the shores of the innocent sea. So a famous prima donna, hidden behind a curtain in strict incognito, might listen to

country girls singing a rustic ballad with contempt and amusement, and a dash of envy too, for how simply the good people accepted her. Harriette could not help reflecting how kindly they sympathized with her anxiety about her husband at the wars, and sat up with her to watch for the light of the postwoman's lanthorn as she came late at night over the hill from Lyme Regis with letters from Mr. Wilson in Spain! All she could do to show her gratitude was to pay twice what they asked her, to shower clothes upon ragged children, to mend a poor country-woman's roof, and then, tired of the role of Lady Bountiful, she was off to join Lord Worcester in Spain.

Now, for a moment, before the old story is resumed, sketched with a stump of rapid charcoal, springs into existence, to fade for ever after, the figure of Miss Martha Edmonds, her landlady's sister. 'I am old enough,' exclaimed the gallant old maid, 'and thank God I am no beauty. . . . I have never yet been ten miles from my native place, and I want to see the world.' She declared her intention of escorting Mrs. Wilson to Falmouth; she had her ancient habit made up for the purpose. Off they started, the old maid and the famous courtesan, to starve and freeze in an upper room of a crowded Falmouth inn, the winds being adverse, until in some mysterious way Mrs. Wilson got into touch first with the Consul and then with the Captain, who were so hospitable, so generous, so kind, that Aunt Martha bought a red rose for her cap, drank champagne, took a hand at cards, and was taught to waltz by Mr. Brown. Their gaieties were cut short, however; a letter demanded Mrs. Wilson's instant presence in London, and Aunt Martha, deposited in Charmouth, could only regret that she had not seen something of life a little sooner, and declare that there 'was a boldness and grandeur about the views in Cornwall which far exceeded anything she had seen in Devonshire'.

Involved once more with Meylers, Lornes, Lambtons, Berkeleys, Leicesters, gossiping as usual in her box at the Opera about this lady and that gentleman, letting young noblemen pull her hair, tapping late at night at Lord Hertford's little private gate in Park Lane, Harriette's life wound in and out among the bogs and precipices of the shadowy underworld which lies on the far side of the sword. Occasionally the jingling and junketing was interrupted by a military figure; the great Duke himself, very like a rat-catcher



in his red ribbon, marched in; asked questions; left money; said he remembered her; had dreamed of her in Spain. 'I dreamed you came out on my staff,' he said. Or there was Lord Byron sitting entirely alone, dressed in brown flowing robes at a masquerade, 'bright, severe, beautiful', demanding 'in a tone of wild and thrilling despondency "Who shall console us for acute bodily anguish?"' Or again the spangled curtain goes up and we see those famous entertainers the sisters Wilson sitting at home at their ease, sparring and squabbling and joking about their lovers; Amy, who adored black puddings; good-natured Fanny, who doted upon donkey-riding; foolish Sophie, who was made a Peeress by Lord Berwick and dropped her sisters; Moll Raffles, Julia, niece to Lord Carysfort and daughter to a maid of honour with the finest legs in Europe — there they sit gossiping profanely and larding their chatter with quotations from Shakespeare and Sterne. Some died prematurely; some married and turned virtuous; some became villains, sorceresses, serpents, and had best be forgotten; while as for Harriette herself, she was scandalously treated by the Beauforts, had to retire to France with her Colonel, would continue to tell the truth about her fine friends so long as they treated her as they did, and grew, we cannot doubt, into a fat good-humoured disreputable old woman who never doubted the goodness of God or denied that the world had treated her well, or regretted, even when the darkness of obscurity and poverty blotted her entirely from view, that she had lived her life on the shady side of the sword.